



Elpis

ἐλπίς

Elpis

Elpis #1  
2016

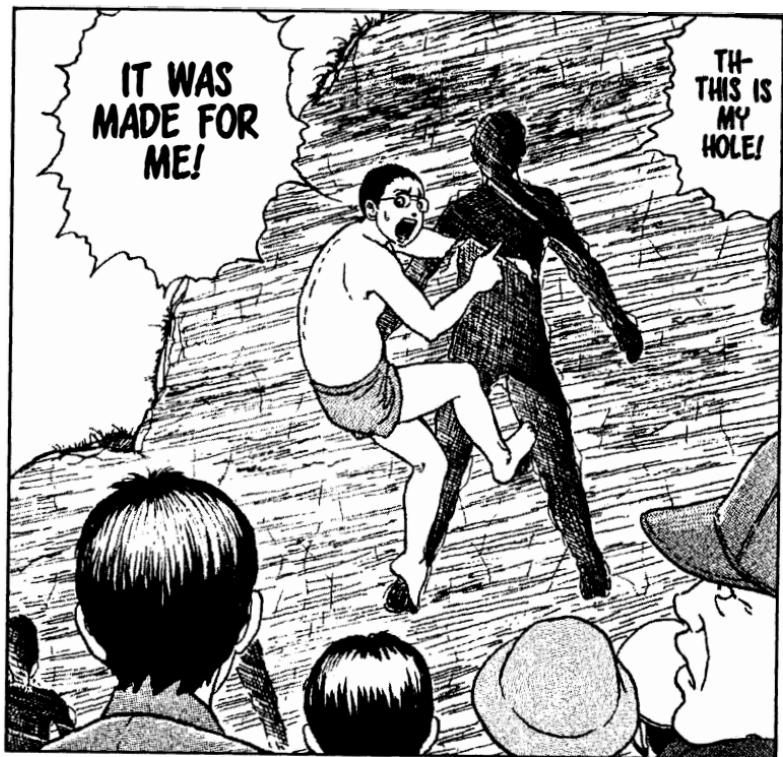
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*The power of laughter is terrible and awful: anyone who has the courage to laugh is master over others, in the same way as anyone who has the courage to die.*

Giacomo Leopardi,  
23 Sept. 1828



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# Elpis

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The titan Epimetheus was being punished for the crimes of his brother Prometheus by Zeus, a well known authoritarian asshole. The punishment was a companion.

From clay, Hephaestos created a woman. Athena breathed life into her. Aphrodite made her beautiful, and Hermes taught her guile. Zeus named her Pandora and married her to Epimetheus.

At the marriage there was a feast. The thiasus (inebriated revelers) of Dionysus brought the wine and the retinue of celebrants. The maenad (female followers of Dionysus) brought the fruit and vegetables. The satyrs brought lamb stew and ox tail. The horae brought garlands of flowers, vines, and perennials. At the end of an evening of merriment and joy, Zeus brought the coup de grace: a gorgeous vase made of bronze and ceramic, crafted most elegantly. Zeus himself would place it on the mantle.

This is the pithos, the fragile container of legend, usually misnamed as a box. It is in fact a vase, made of earth and covered with characters to make a permanent impression. This particular pithos told a story, in two verses, of the theft of fire and the punishment of the theft. The tale of how Prometheus stole fire (technology) from Mount Olympus and was punished by, each day for eternity, having an eagle tear out and consume his liver, which regenerated nightly.

Inside this pithos, Zeus stored knowledge of a specific type. It wasn't the knowledge of columns and construction. It wasn't of bricks and engineering, nor of humors and medicine. It was the knowledge of self-examination and philosophy. It was of the terror and painful pleasure of knowing that one existed in a world of other terrorized people. Inside this gloriously painted pithos that told the story of the liberation of science and the results of its emancipation was a

deeper punishment, self-awareness. Upon delivery, a stern warning was given. This pithos was to be appreciated from afar. It was Art and not craft.

For Pandora, alongside the qualities given by the gods (breath and beauty) were more human (all-too-human) traits. Impatience, curiosity, and contrariness meant that when Pandora was told no by the god Zeus, all she heard was a call to action, a topic to obsess about, an arbitrary rule to be questioned and interrogated. Eventually, this meant that Pandora had to take a peek, had to change that no to a yes and, ultimately, live with the consequence of being a human in a world where gods existed.

What was unleashed by opening the pithos was the possibility of a rich internal life as well as the horrors (and titillations) unleashed upon the world by that first spark and its evolution to the bombs of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The dialectical inversion was the terror/ecstasy of rolling down a hill in a barrel, of jumping off a cliff into the ocean, it was the rush of a new lover. What Pandora saw was nothing. The rending claws of anxiety, the suffering of self-awareness, and the misery of ennui are not visible. They are felt, but neither seen nor heard nor smelt. They can entirely dominate a person's experience of the world and yet be entirely invisible.

After the pithos was opened, God was transgressed, and the horror of real life was unleashed upon the world--there was something left in the jar. This was something stunted and weak. This was something crushed by self-reflection and neglected by the techniques of Prometheus. This remnant is elpis, the spirit of anarchy. It is what is left behind by the Titans of technology and psychology after they have ruined the world.

Pandora, realizing what a great mistake she had made by opening the pithos, scurried to repair her mistake. She attempted to recover the winged beasts of anxiety, self-awareness, and ennui. She closed the vase before everything within could escape. She closed the vase before elpis could

be released to the world. She kept it in captivity before it could unfurl its wings.

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This new journal *Elpis* lives in the space in which anarchism cohabitates with nihilism. Whereas prior entries in this space concerned themselves more with fierce questions about who and what to destroy and less about what is political about hating everything and having no hope that (individual) human agency can effect enough of the change one would wish upon the world, this entry is different. This journal emphasizes the latter rather than the former.

It is partially inspired by a similar journal called Bezna from Romania (<http://bezzzna.blogspot.com/>). This is a different point of entry into the same space they inhabit.

Bezna sect actions are often anti-social, post-political, theoretical, or, even worse, aesthetic. Bezna meetings are secret and its activities are full of obscurity.

Between suicide and routine is the most contemporary of conceptual spaces. Nihilism bangs around in here as a shortcut to a political orientation against the existing order, but the number of things to oppose includes politics. This journal uses writing by known writers to make this case. Most of these writers have been owned, up till now, by academics and their offspring. Part of the goal of this project is to take these writers and declare them ours.

Anarchism is being tortured at the current time. It has failed as a political perspective capable of changing the world. It has failed as a life-saving ideology. It has failed as an action plan. As a result, many of its beautiful children have abandoned it. Most are hunting for a new solution decanted from the same set of post-French Revolution ideas that fueled anarchism. Many more have returned to the mass culture ennui from which they originated.

This project fights that tendency by saying that we, as anarchists, can take from this world and declare a new day

that is not oriented in a manichean dualism. It may instead be couched in defeat, sadness, and negativity. A pessimist orientation against all the metanarratives may not result in joy but in sadness. It might declare that the human project of will and procreation has been but a minor chapter of a greater story of a planet that spun on its axis for a time until it was swallowed by the sun that birthed it in the first place.



*He that best understands the World, least likes it.*

Poor Richard's Almanack  
1753

*The world rolls round forever like a mill;  
It grinds out death and life and good and ill;  
It has no purpose, heart or mind or will.*

James Thomson  
*City of Dreadful Night*

*Cheer up, the worst is yet to come.*

Philander Chase Johnson,  
*Shooting Stars*

There are so many reasons to love *The Dark Side: Thoughts on the Futility of Life from the Ancient Greeks to the Present*. More than just a compilation of quotes like those above, it is a sweeping and amazingly researched book on nihilist and pessimist thought throughout history. Inside is a gem of an interview with a nihilist, Dr. X. It is the antithesis of the nausea-inducing It Gets Better campaign aimed at queer youth recently. If you aren't yet sympathetic to nihilism--perhaps even believe it part of a creeping fascism--take a deep breath, a good hard look around you and inside yourself (this may be the harder part), and read this "Interview with a Nihilist." Written in 1993, everything easily applies to our present day. There is no light at the end of this tunnel. It only gets darker. Optimists beware!

# Interview with a Nihilist

*WHO OBSERVES THAT WHAT HE SUSPECTED ALL ALONG IS  
COMING TO FRUITION WITH ASTONISHING SPEED*

*Alan R Pratt*

---

*This interview with "Dr. X" took place on 22 August, 1993, fifteen miles south of Atlanta, Georgia, near Interstate 75. "X" is a divorced, chain-smoking, fifty-five-year-old academician who has published several studies on late Victorian poetry. Reading his work, I was intrigued by certain nuances in his thought that compelled me to write to him about The Dark Side. After several telephone conversations, he agreed to be interviewed but insisted on anonymity because, as he put it, "it's simply too much trouble to act consistently with one's convictions."—A.*

Let me tell you how it happened, how one day the mysterious secret was revealed to me. When I understood—astonished that I was to be one of the ordained few—I laughed aloud, laughed more intensely than I'd ever laughed before. So this was it!—*pandemonium and suffering are divine design!*...

I'm jesting, but didn't you enjoy the reference to the supernatural. I'm confident Oedipus would've appreciated the irony...but you wanted my assessment, correct?

It can't be repeated too often that existence is inevitably and shockingly idiotic. And now that human experience is further dehumanized the question of whether or not life has any intrinsic worth isn't just an appropriate issue, but a pressing one. Still, there are *many* misguided, myopic idealists who are convinced it's reprehensible to even *raise* the question of life's value. Victor Frankl, for one, comes to mind. You're familiar with him? A distinguished but naive man, he thought that questioning life's value was tantamount to existential treason.<sup>1</sup>

1 Dr. Victor Frankl was the inventor of Logotherapy, the therapy of

Undoubtedly, Frankl's experience with the most colossal, diligent, and well-organized bloodbath ever conceived prejudiced his existential outlook. Nevertheless, I'm sure you too realize that even if Dr. Frankl were right, his position is unhelpful. Whether or not it's appropriate to articulate the maliciously gratuitous conditions of existence is moot... now even a three-year-old can articulate—succinctly articulate—our *Weltanschauung*: "Everything is nasty." *Nasty*, indeed!...occurs to me that "nastier yet" nicely defines the rank future...So, to question life isn't sick in itself, though it will surely make you queasy, *n'est pas*?

You're right to accuse me; my duplicity is disingenuous. Yes, I've made a pretense of taking life seriously, of pledging myself to a facade of industry, sincerity, and sobriety....Those who perceive me as I appear would undoubtedly be enraged by my *true* amused contempt for the long catalog of human perversities and stupidities. "Someone malevolent like you, self-serving, corrupt," they might begin and denounce me as an obscene malcontent... only because of the meager satisfaction I derive from sharing my penetrating insights.

Defensive? No, of course not; I recognize my own modest shortcomings, and, at times I do loathe myself...but isn't it true that from the very beginning human beings have despised themselves? Those who don't are either mindless rubes or pompous asses. In my *munificent benevolence*, I can forgive purblind accusations, then. In fact, I've actually acquired a taste for the absurd and enjoy this vast comedy of impotent passion...it's clear we're not living in Eden...But you asked for my perspicacity.

What one giddy idealist *should've* said is: "A SPECTRE is haunting the West—the spectre of *nothing*, and the history of hitherto existing societies is the history of *nihilism's*

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generating meaning. Frankl barely survived years of confinement in a Nazi concentration camp. I suspect "X" was referring to this passage: *As justified as the writer might be in sharing his own sense of futility with the reader, it is irresponsible cynically to preach the absurdity of existence. If the writer is not capable of immunizing the reader against despair, he should at least refrain from inoculating him with despair.*

evolution.”<sup>2</sup> We’re at the unusual juncture in history where the level of entropy is approaching critical mass. Think of it: There’s more knowledge than ever before, but *never*—and the past’s a cornucopia of misery!—*never* has there been as much bewilderment, discontent, misery, and alienation... why do they do it?...they’re creatures who possess...an unlimited capacity for misery...which,...how sad—such pathetic groveling grubs anyway.

Nihilism is rolling us from the center toward X.<sup>3</sup> The “X”? How else can it be explained? Things *are* falling apart. The center *will* not hold.<sup>4</sup> You agree that our history for at least a hundred years can only be interpreted as a process of accelerating decay? *Consider the frightful consequences!*...that’s what’s *truly* interesting. Someone once said, “Dream the Dream.” Well, the dream’s turned to nightmare. The West, the once glorious, enlightened benefactor to the world—an ethnocentric evaluation, of course—is now much maligned; sinking in the ooze of its own excreta, it’s morally bankrupt, a flyblown hulk. Necrologies grow longer every day as it reels from one crippling blow after another...everywhere evidence of economic stagnation, vanished opportunities, exhausted resources...some of the most incredibly venal relationships ever...everywhere, an unbridled inclination to destroy for destruction’s sake.

2 Modified material from Karl Marx’s and Friedrich Engels’ **COMMUNIST MANIFESTO** (1848). The sentences actually read “A SPECTRE is haunting Europe—the spectre of communism.” And several paragraphs later, “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggle.”

3 I am familiar with this reference. It is from a note, “Toward an Outline,” found at the beginning of the first edition of Friedrich Nietzsche’s *Will to Power*.

4 This is one of several allusions to William Butler Yeats, “The Second Coming,” 1921. The poem begins with these lines:

*Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,  
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere  
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;  
The best lack all conviction, while the worst  
Are full of passionate intensity...*

As the whole nasty mess hobbles painfully into oblivion, the endgame promises the marvel of an entropic zenith... imagine, chaos perfected!...*perfect chaos!*... You're well aware that those who are unable or unwilling to appreciate their terminal position in a dying world are *seething with ressentiment*; outraged at the whole rank cosmos...eruptions of rabid violence...It's a new code: Can't cope with the world? *Raze it!* Nothing, however, will assuage their growing horror. The king is dead...*the King is dead! Long live the King!*...Shrill? No reason to be shrill. No, no reason at all.

Well, yes, of course, I can see there's been progress, but I clearly see that what was laudable is now rotten...only malignancies burgeon. The herd's acquiring what I'll call "cosmic consciousness," the unpleasant awareness of the abject futility of their paltry and inconsequential lives. Elitist? You believe that I imagine myself superior? Please understand that I want to sympathize completely with their painful failures; my commanding sense of *noblesse oblige* insists on it...I'd be less than honorable, however, if, in spite of my acute empathy, I didn't mention how I detest the onerous weight of mediocrity's conformist pressures...but I digress.

Listen to the herd's ever-louder bleating for order, equality, and *entertainment*. Potent narcotics, frightening cults, and stupefying non-participatory amusements—more vapid than anyone ever thought possible—pander to the geometrically multiplying masses. And why shouldn't the herd's appetites, its *natural* tastes and temperaments, be indulged? There's nothing else for them... the unseemly diversions protect millions of blunted psyches from staring at failure...who ever heard of preserving excreta?

There are several other observations I'll share with you. Consider that the militant anti-intellectualism of the herd is surpassed only by the effete cerebralism of a dwindling intelligentsia. Humanistic study, you realize, has evolved into a craft of cataloging meaningless trivia, a dead-end, narcissistic masturbation for the mind. I, myself, exemplify the trend; I've *chewed* the sawdust, remember? The fine arts? The fine arts, *ha!* For decades, they've been fer-

menting in *nothing*. Now they're the province of enterprising hacks who cannibalize the rotting carcass or who explore impotence, sterility, and exhaustion. The crowning irony, I suppose, is, with the exception of the self-ordained arbiters and sniveling sycophants, few *even care* whether or not high culture exists...we're all sycophants... If I were to study a reflection of myself...smiling, I'd note that I too gnawed the bone... didn't swallow, though... gagged... it lodged in the throat to choke....

What? Oh. I was thinking of something else...of being throttled in... That? Philosophy has argued itself out of existence. Theologies? Devotees either adopt a defiant fundamentalism or abandon the spiritual life altogether. Who'll be surprised when internecine squabbling unleashes a bloody *jihad*? You can *smell* exhaustion, defeat in the sciences, too. Science—the last bastion of certitude, the savior...the modern God!—has abdicated to chaos, conceding that its claims have been exaggerated...that it's incapable of providing satisfactory explanations or prescribing cures...that when all is said and done, mighty Reason's paralyzed by *nothing*. Another irony. Insights gleaned from centuries of discovery shatter the myth that we were ever anything more than a sack of mucus, of foul-smelling emulsions, and electrochemical processes. *Quelle surprise!*

So, we've picked away the scab of illusion and touched the oozing ulcer beneath. It's finally clear that the structure of meanings we've evolved over three thousand years has been an *appalling* mistake...we've no idea how to salvage the situation. From my *enlightened* perspective, every indicator points to a dying way of life, toward disintegration—toward *Nothing*. Any heartening prophecies or utopian dreams of rejuvenation should be handily dismissed...they're vacuous fantasies of the blind, valuable only as a stimulant for contemptuous laughter. There are no anodynes...life *is* an affliction, an excruciatingly painful one, at that. Everything is *instabilis tellus, innabilis unda*... no doubt, I believe it exactly because it *is* absurd.<sup>5</sup>

What to do...yes, what to do? For the vast majority—the walking dead—there's only increasing chaos, anxiety, and despair. See all of the creatures there? There they are, hunched over the wheel, speeding down the interstate, hurtling to nowhere, into a future that doesn't exist, into nothing.

For a select few, on the other hand, those enlightened by the darkness, the endgame offers the marvel of *disintegrative poetics*. Maggots, blow flies, pestilence, disaster, carnage—the astonishing, grotesque absurdity of it all!—isn't just intriguing, it's spiritually fulfilling. Imagine! centuries of disintegration culminating *in our time*.

And even for the timorous nihilist, such as myself...*mea culpa*... too apathetic to capitalize on lawlessness and chaos, too weak to sever himself from the whole sordid mess and drift into the impenetrable darkness of the Void, even for him there are fortuitous opportunities. With the spectacle of a civilization in the fatal convulsive spasms, there's the daily round of gratuitous violence and destruction, all tinged with hopelessness; the necrophilic satisfaction of contemplating the colossal ruins; and the challenge of provoking *Nothing* to expose panic yet untapped...Odd, but I find myself frequently yearning for the final blows.

You object? What would *you* have me do? Whether you celebrate it, laugh at it, denigrate it, conceal it, lash out at it, or struggle with it, *nothing alters Nothing*. Only the nihilist is completely synchronized with the times; only the nihilist can assert moral superiority, nay, *moral perfection!* To think nihilistically is a divine way of thinking.<sup>6</sup>

*Unfortunately, I cannot help you. All I have for facing death myself, is a foolish smile.*

Peter Wessel Zapffe

one cannot swim." "I believe because it is absurd" is a variation of the first-century Christian apologist Tertullian's famous credo: "It is thoroughly credible because it is absurd" (*DE CARNE CHRISTI*, c. 5).

<sup>6</sup> Nietzsche says something similar in **THE WILL TO POWER**: "To this extent, nihilism, as the denial of a truthful world, of being, might be a divine way of thinking." (Trans. Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale. New York: Vintage Books 1968, p. 15.)



*According to Zapffe, it's one thing to experience suffering and then die. But it's quite another thing to be acutely conscious that this is our life—to be aware that we suffer for no good reason and have only a decline into death, or death by trauma, to look forward to. In order to cope with our consciousness of these realities, then, we must smother our consciousness as best we can by using various tactics. The result is a whole species of beings that have to lie unceasingly to themselves, not always successfully, about what they are and what their lives are really like. If we didn't do this, the rug would be pulled out from under us and we'd have to face up to the fact that we're a race that can't come to terms with its existence. Thus we devise ways to mute, distract, and otherwise obfuscate our consciousness so that it doesn't overwhelm us with what we're up against in being alive. This line of thought goes beyond hedonism by exposing us as creatures who bullshit themselves a mile a minute in order to keep going.*

Thomas Ligotti,  
interview with Geoffrey Goodwin (2007)

*In The Last Messiah, Norwegian philosopher and mountain climber Peter Zapffe lays out the core of his pessimistic perspective and in so doing elaborates a system of self-deceptions and seductions by which one avoids falling into a tarry pit of nihilism. However, upon reflection, I think it becomes clear that this system is a body of strategies by which one avoids psychic pain in general—not merely that stemming from the vacuum tug of meaninglessness—and that those who labor under such pain, as must those who wish to change the world, risk becoming lost at every turn among the phantom threat of funhouse doppelgangers or drowned beneath the needless burden of an anchor carried only for the sureness of its weight. If there is no freedom from these things in this life—and Zapffe certainly does not pretend to such—I at least prefer my lies and comforting burdens to be the ones I have chosen for myself.*

# The Last Messiah

Peter Wessel Zapffe

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## I

One night in long bygone times, man awoke and *saw himself*. He saw that he was naked under cosmos, homeless in his own body. All things dissolved before his testing thought, wonder above wonder, horror above horror unfolded in his mind.

Then woman too awoke and said it was time to go and slay. And he fetched his bow and arrow, a fruit of the marriage of spirit and hand, and went outside beneath the stars. But as the beasts arrived at their waterholes where he expected them of habit, he felt no more the tiger's bound in his blood, but a great psalm about the brotherhood of suffering between everything alive.

That day he did not return with prey, and when they found him by the next new moon, he was sitting dead by the waterhole.

## II

Whatever happened? A breach in the very unity of life, a biological paradox, an abomination, an absurdity, an exaggeration of disastrous nature. Life had overshot its target, blowing itself apart. A species had been armed too heavily—by spirit made almighty without, but equally a menace to its own well-being. Its weapon was like a sword without hilt or plate, a two-edged blade cleaving everything; but he who is to wield it must grasp the blade and turn the one edge toward himself.

Despite his new eyes, man was still rooted in matter, his soul spun into it and subordinated to its blind laws. And yet he could see matter as a stranger, compare himself to all phenomena, see through and locate his vital processes. He comes to nature as an unbidden guest, in vain extending his

arms to beg conciliation with his maker: Nature answers no more, it performed a miracle with man, but later did not know him. He has lost his right of residence in the universe, has eaten from the Tree of Knowledge and been expelled from Paradise. He is mighty in the near world, but curses his might as purchased with his harmony of soul, his innocence, his inner peace in life's embrace.

So there he stands with his visions, betrayed by the universe, in wonder and fear. The beast knew fear as well, in thunderstorms and on the lion's claw. But man became fearful of life itself—indeed, of his very being. Life—that was for the beast to feel the play of power, it was heat and games and strife and hunger, and then at last to bow before the law of course. In the beast, suffering is self-confined, in man, it knocks holes into a fear of the world and a despair of life. Even as the child sets out on the river of life, the roars from the waterfall of death rise highly above the vale, ever closer, and tearing, tearing at its joy. Man beholds the earth, and it is breathing like a great lung; whenever it exhales, delightful life swarms from all its pores and reaches out toward the sun, but when it inhales, a moan of rupture passes through the multitude, and corpses whip the ground like bouts of hail. Not merely his own day could he see, the graveyards wrung themselves before his gaze, the laments of sunken millennia wailed against him from the ghastly decaying shapes, the earth-turned dreams of mothers. Future's curtain unravelled itself to reveal a nightmare of endless repetition, a senseless squander of organic material. The suffering of human billions makes its entrance into him through the gateway of compassion, from all that happen arises a laughter to mock the demand for justice, his profoundest ordering principle. He sees himself emerge in his mother's womb, he holds up his hand in the air and it has five branches; whence this devilish number five, and what has it to do with my soul? He is no longer obvious to himself—he touches his body in utter horror; this is you and so far do you extend and no farther. He carries a meal within him, yesterday it was a beast that could itself dash around, now I suck it up and make it part of me, and

where do I begin and end? All things chain together in causes and effects, and everything he wants to grasp dissolves before the testing thought. Soon he sees mechanics even in the so-far whole and dear, in the smile of his beloved—there are other smiles as well, a torn boot with toes. Eventually, the features of things are features only of himself. Nothing exists without himself, every line points back at him, the world is but a ghostly echo of his voice—he leaps up loudly screaming and wants to disgorge himself onto the earth along with his impure meal, he feels the looming of madness and wants to find death before losing even such ability.

But as he stands before imminent death, he grasps its nature also, and the cosmic import of the step to come. His creative imagination constructs new, fearful prospects behind the curtain of death, and he sees that even there is no sanctuary found. And now he can discern the outline of his biologicocosmic terms: He is the universe's helpless captive, kept to fall into nameless possibilities.

From this moment on, he is in a state of relentless panic.

Such a '*feeling of cosmic panic*' is pivotal to every human mind. Indeed, the race appears destined to perish in so far as any effective preservation and continuation of life is ruled out when all of the individual's attention and energy goes to endure, or relay, the catastrophic high tension within.

The tragedy of a species becoming unfit for life by overevolving one ability is not confined to humankind. Thus it is thought, for instance, that certain deer in paleontological times succumbed as they acquired overly-heavy horns. The mutations must be considered blind, they work, are thrown forth, without any contact of interest with their environment.

In depressive states, the mind may be seen in the image of such an antler, in all its fantastic splendour pinning its bearer to the ground.

### III

Why, then, has mankind not long ago gone extinct during

great epidemics of madness? Why do only a fairly minor number of individuals perish because they fail to endure the strain of living—because cognition gives them more than they can carry?

Cultural history, as well as observation of ourselves and others, allow the following answer: Most people learn to save themselves by artificially limiting the content of consciousness.

If the giant deer, at suitable intervals, had broken off the outer spears of its antlers, it might have kept going for some while longer. Yet in fever and constant pain, indeed, in betrayal of its central idea, the core of its peculiarity, for it was vocated by creation's hand to be the *horn bearer* of wild animals. What it gained in continuance, it would lose in significance, in grandness of life, in other words a continuance without hope, a march not *up to* affirmation, but forth across its ever recreated ruins, a self-destructive race against the sacred will of blood.

The identity of purpose and perishment is, for giant deer and man alike, the tragic paradox of life. In devoted *Bejahung*, the last *Cervis Giganticus* bore the badge of its lineage to its end. The human being saves itself and carries on. It performs, to extend a settled phrase, a more or less self-conscious *repression* of its damaging surplus of consciousness. This process is virtually constant during our waking and active hours and is a requirement of social adaptability and of everything commonly referred to as healthy and normal living.

Psychiatry even works on the assumption that the healthy and viable is at one with the highest in personal terms. Depression, "fear of life," refusal of nourishment, and so on are invariably taken as signs of a pathological state and treated thereafter. Often, however, such phenomena are messages from a deeper, more immediate sense of life, bitter fruits of a geniality of thought or feeling at the root of antibiological tendencies. It is not the soul being sick, but its protection failing, or else being rejected because it is experienced—correctly—as a betrayal of ego's highest potential.

The whole of living that we see before our eyes today is from inmost to outmost enmeshed in repressional mechanisms, social and individual; they can be traced right into the tritest formulas of everyday life. Though they take a vast and multifarious variety of forms, it seems legitimate to at least identify four major kinds, naturally occurring in every possible combination: isolation, anchoring, distraction, and sublimation.

By *isolation* I here mean a fully arbitrary dismissal from consciousness of all disturbing and destructive thought and feeling. (Engström: "One should not think, it is just confusing.") A perfect and almost brutalising variant is found among certain physicians, who for self-protection will only see the technical aspect of their profession. It can also decay to pure hooliganism, as among petty thugs and medical students, where any sensitivity to the tragic side of life is eradicated by violent means (football played with cadaver heads, and so on).

In everyday interaction, isolation is manifested in a general code of mutual silence: primarily toward children, so these are not at once scared senseless by the life they have just begun, but retain their illusions until they can afford to lose them. In return, children are not to bother the adults with untimely reminders of sex, toilet, or death. Among adults, there are the rules of tact, the mechanism being openly displayed when a man who weeps on the street is removed with police assistance.

The mechanism of *anchoring* also serves from early childhood; parents, home, the street become matters of *course* to the child and give it a sense of assurance. This sphere of experience is the first, and perhaps the happiest, protection against the cosmos that we ever get to know in life, a fact that doubtless also explains the much debated infantile bonding; the question of whether that is sexually tainted too is unimportant here. When the child later discovers that those fixed points are as arbitrary and ephemeral as any others, it has a crisis of confusion and anxiety and promptly looks around for another anchoring. "In Autumn, I will attend middle school." If the substitution somehow fails, then the cri-

sis may take a fatal course, or else what I will call an *anchoring spasm* occurs: One clings to the dead values, concealing as well as possible from oneself and others the fact that they are unworkable, that one is spiritually insolvent. The result is lasting insecurity, feelings of inferiority, over-compensation, restlessness. Insofar as this state falls into certain categories, it is made subject to psychoanalytic treatment, which aims to complete the transition to new anchorings.

Anchoring might be characterised as a fixation of points within, or construction of walls around, the liquid fray of consciousness. Though typically unconscious, it may also be fully conscious (one "adopts a goal"). Publicly useful anchorings are met with sympathy, he who "sacrifices himself totally" for his anchoring (the firm, the cause) is idolised. He has established a mighty bulwark against the dissolution of life, and others are by suggestion gaining from his strength. In a brutalised form, as deliberate action, it is found among decadent playboys ("one should get married in time, and then the constraints will come of themselves"). Thus one establishes a necessity in one's life, exposing oneself to an obvious evil from one's point of view, but a soothing of the nerves, a high-walled container for a sensibility to life that has been growing increasingly crude. Ibsen presents, in *Hjalmar Ekdal and Molvik*, two flowering cases ("living lies"); there is no difference between their anchoring and that of the pillars of society except for the practico-economic unproductiveness of the former.

Any culture is a great, rounded system of anchorings, built on foundational firmaments, the basic cultural ideas. The average person makes do with the collective firmaments, the personality he is building for himself, the person of character has finished his construction, more or less grounded on the inherited, collective main firmaments (God, the Church, the State, morality, fate, the law of life, the people, the future). The closer to main firmaments a certain carrying element is, the more perilous it is to touch. Here a direct protection is normally established by means of penal codes and threats of prosecution (inquisition, censorship,

the Conservative approach to life).

The carrying capacity of each segment either depends on its fictitious nature having not been seen through yet, or else on its being recognised as necessary anyway. Hence the religious education in schools, which even atheists support because they know no other way to bring children into social ways of response.

Whenever people realise the fictitiousness or redundancy of the segments, they will strive to replace them with new ones ("the limited duration of Truths")—and whence flows all the spiritual and cultural strife that, along with economic competition, forms the dynamic content of world history.

The craving for material goods (power) is not so much due to the direct pleasures of wealth, as none can be seated on more than one chair or eat himself more than sated. Rather, the value of a fortune to life consists in the rich opportunities for anchoring and distraction offered to the owner.

Both for collective and individual anchorings, it holds that when a segment breaks, there is a crisis that is graver the closer that segment to main firmaments. Within the inner circles, sheltered by the outer ramparts, such crises are daily and fairly painfree occurrences ("disappointments"); even a playing with anchoring values is here seen (wittiness, jargon, alcohol). But during such play one may accidentally rip a hole right to the bottom, and the scene is instantly transformed from euphoric to macabre. The dread of being stares us in the eye, and in a deadly gush we perceive how the minds are dangling in threads of their own spinning, and that a hell is lurking underneath.

The very foundational firmaments are rarely replaced without great social spasms and a risk of complete dissolution (reformation, revolution). During such times, individuals are increasingly left to their own devices for anchoring, and the number of failures tends to rise. Depressions, excesses, and suicides result (German officers after the war, Chinese students after the revolution).

Another flaw of the system is the fact that various danger fronts often require very different firmaments. As a logi-

cal superstructure is built upon each, there follow clashes of incommensurable modes of feeling and thought. Then despair can enter through the rifts. In such cases, a person may be obsessed with destructive joy, dislodging the whole artificial apparatus of his life and starting with rapturous horror to make a clean sweep of it. The horror stems from the loss of all sheltering values, the rapture from his by now ruthless identification and harmony with our nature's deepest secret, the biological unsoundness, the enduring disposition for doom.

We love the anchorings for saving us, but also hate them for limiting our sense of freedom. Whenever we feel strong enough, we thus take pleasure in going together to bury an expired value in style. Material objects take on a symbolic import here (the Radical approach to life).

When a human being has eliminated those of his anchorings that are visible to himself, only the unconscious ones staying put, then he will call himself a liberated personality.

A very popular mode of protection is *distraction*. One limits attention to the critical bounds by constantly entralling it with impressions. This is typical even in childhood; without distraction, the child is also insufferable to itself. "Mom, what am I to do." A little English girl visiting her Norwegian aunts came inside from her room, saying: "What happens now?" The nurses attain virtuosity: Look, a doggie! Watch, they are painting the palace! The phenomenon is too familiar to require any further demonstration. Distraction is, for example, the 'high society's' tactic for living. It can be likened to a flying machine—made of heavy material, but embodying a principle that keeps it airborne whenever applying. It must always be in motion, as air only carries it fleetingly. The pilot may grow drowsy and comfortable out of habit, but the crisis is acute as soon as the engine flunks.

The tactic is often fully conscious. Despair may dwell right underneath and break through in gushes, in a sudden sobbing. When all distractive options are expended, spleen sets in, ranging from mild indifference to fatal depression.

Women, in general less cognition-prone and hence more secure in their living than men, preferably use distraction.

A considerable evil of imprisonment is the denial of most distractive options. And as terms for deliverance by other means are poor as well, the prisoner will tend to stay in the close vicinity of despair. The acts he then commits to deflect the final stage have a warrant in the principle of vitality itself. In such a moment he is experiencing his soul within the universe, and has no other motive than the utter inendurability of that condition.

Pure examples of life-panic are presumably rare, as the protective mechanisms are refined and automatic and to some extent unremitting. But even the adjacent terrain bears the mark of death, life is here barely sustainable and only by great efforts. Death always appears as an escape, one ignores the possibilities of the hereafter, and as the way death is experienced is partly dependent on feeling and perspective, it might be quite an acceptable solution. If one in *statu mortis* could manage a pose (a poem, a gesture, to 'die standing up'), i.e. a final anchoring, or a final distraction (Aases' death), then such a fate is not the worst one at all. The press, for once serving the concealment mechanism, never fails to find reasons that cause no alarm—"it is believed that the latest fall in the price of wheat..."

When a human being takes his life in depression, this is a *natural* death of spiritual causes. The modern barbarity of "saving" the suicidal is based on a hairraising misapprehension of the nature of existence.

Only a limited part of humanity can make do with mere "changes," whether in work, social life, or entertainment. The cultured person demands connections, lines, a progression in the changes. Nothing finite satisfies at length, one is ever proceeding, gathering knowledge, making a career. The phenomenon is known as "yearning" or "transcendental tendency." Whenever a goal is reached, the yearning moves on; hence its object is not the goal, but the very attainment of it—the gradient, not the absolute height, of the curve representing one's life. The promotion from private to corporal may give a more

valuable experience than the one from colonel to general. Any grounds of "progressive optimism" are removed by this major psychological law.

The human yearning is not merely marked by a "striving toward," but equally by an "escape from." And if we use the word in a religious sense, only the latter description fits. For here, none has yet been clear about what he is longing *for*, but one has always a heartfelt awareness of what one is longing *away from*, namely the earthly vale of tears, one's own inendurable condition. If awareness of this predicament is the deepest stratum of the soul, as argued above, then it is also understandable why the religious yearning is felt and experienced as fundamental. By contrast, the hope that it forms a divine criterion, which harbours a promise of its own fulfilment, is placed in a truly melancholy light by these considerations.

The fourth remedy against panic, *sublimation*, is a matter of transformation rather than repression. Through stylistic or artistic gifts can the very pain of living at times be converted into valuable experiences. Positive impulses engage the evil and put it to their own ends, fastening onto its pictorial, dramatic, heroic, lyric or even comic aspects.

Unless the worst sting of suffering is blunted by other means, or denied control of the mind, such utilisation is unlikely, however. (Image: The mountaineer does not *enjoy* his view of the abyss while choking with vertigo; only when this feeling is more or less overcome does he *enjoy* it—anchored.) To write a tragedy, one must to some extent free oneself from—betray—the very feeling of tragedy and regard it from an outer, e.g. aesthetic, point of view. Here is, by the way, an opportunity for the wildest round-dancing through ever higher ironic levels, into a most embarrassing *circulus vitiosus*. Here one can chase one's ego across numerous habitats, enjoying the capacity of the various layers of consciousness to dispel one another.

The present essay is a typical attempt at sublimation. The author does not suffer, he is filling pages and is going to be published in a journal.

The martyrdom of lonely ladies also shows a kind of sublimation—they gain in significance thereby.

Nevertheless, sublimation appears to be the rarest of the protective means mentioned here.

#### IV

Is it possible for “primitive natures” to renounce these cramps and cavorts and live in harmony with themselves in the serene bliss of labour and love? Insofar as they may be considered human at all, I think the answer must be no. The strongest claim to be made about the so-called peoples of nature is that they are somewhat closer to the wonderful biological ideal than we unnatural people. And when even we have so far been able to save a majority through every storm, we have been assisted by the sides of our nature that are just modestly or moderately developed. This positive basis (as protection alone cannot create life, only hinder its faltering) must be sought in the naturally adapted deployment of the energy in the body and the biologically helpful parts of the soul<sup>7</sup>, subject to such hardships as are *precisely* due to sensory limitations, bodily frailty, and the need to do work for life and love.

And just in this finite land of bliss within the fronts do the progressing civilisation, technology, and standardisation have such a debasing influence. For as an ever-growing fraction of the cognitive faculties retire from the game against the environment, there is a rising *spiritual unemployment*. The value of a technical advance to the whole undertaking of life must be judged by its contribution to the human opportunity for spiritual occupation. Though boundaries are blurry, perhaps the first tools for cutting might be mentioned as a case of a positive invention.

Other technical inventions enrich only the life of the inventor himself; they represent a gross and ruthless theft from humankind’s common reserve of experiences and should invoke the harshest punishment if made public against the veto of censorship. One such crime among

numerous others is the use of flying machines to explore uncharted land. In a single vandalistic glob, one thus destroys lush opportunities for experience that could benefit many if each, by effort, obtained his fair share.<sup>8</sup>

The current phase of life's chronic fever is particularly tainted by this circumstance. The absence of naturally (biologically) based spiritual activity shows up, for example, in the pervasive recourse to *distraction* (entertainment, sport, radio—"the rhythm of the times"). Terms for anchoring are not as favourable—all the inherited, collective systems of anchorings are punctured by criticism, and anxiety, disgust, confusion, despair leak in through the rifts ("corpses in the cargo"). Communism and psychoanalysis, however incomensurable otherwise, both attempt (as Communism has also a spiritual reflection) by novel means to vary the old escape anew; applying, respectively, violence and guile to make humans biologically fit by ensnaring their critical surplus of cognition. The idea, in either case, is uncannily logical. But again, it cannot yield a final solution. Though a deliberate degeneration to a more viable nadir may certainly save the species in the short run, it will by its nature be unable to find peace in such resignation, or indeed find any peace at all.

## V

If we continue these considerations to the bitter end, then the conclusion is not in doubt. As long as humankind recklessly proceeds in the fateful delusion of being biologically fated for triumph, nothing essential will change. As its numbers mount and the spiritual atmosphere thickens, the techniques of protection must assume an increasingly brutal character.

And humans will persist in dreaming of salvation and affirmation and a new Messiah. Yet when many saviours have been nailed to trees and stoned on the city squares, then the last Messiah shall come.

Then will appear the man who, as the first of all, has

8 I emphasize that this is not about fantastic reform proposals, but rather a psychological view of principle

dared strip his soul naked and submit it alive to the outmost thought of the lineage, the very idea of doom. A man who has fathomed life and its cosmic ground, and whose pain is the Earth's collective pain. With what furious screams shall not mobs of all nations cry out for his thousandfold death, when like a cloth his voice encloses the globe, and the strange message has resounded for the first and last time:

“—The life of the worlds is a roaring river, but Earth's is a pond and a backwater.

—The sign of doom is written on your brows—how long will ye kick against the pin-pricks?

—But there is one conquest and one crown, one redemption and one solution.

—Know yourselves—*be infertile and let the earth be silent after ye.*”

And when he has spoken, they will pour themselves over him, led by the pacifier makers and the midwives, and bury him in their fingernails.

He is the last Messiah. As son from father, he stems from the archer by the waterhole.

*The following essay was taken from *Visions of Excess* 1927-1939 which contains many worthy essays, but Georges Bataille shines when he writes in his symbolic, poetical prose like that of "The Sacred Conspiracy". He is a philosophical giant, yet unfortunately I'm not sure many anarchists would say they were, or are, influenced by his thoughts. I hope this changes.*

*The mundanity we live in crushes us until we are no longer living beings and to merely exist is obscene. Anyone seeking a free life should be at war against boredom and the banality of civilization. The ecstatic experience can occur from any situation where one is pushed into an extreme state, and this is the area that Georges Bataille explores. It can be brought about by dancing all night at an illegal rave, S&M, rioting, side-shows...but ecstatic experience can also come from a place of death and terror. Many death camp survivors were anguished to come back to the same indifferent world. "I am dead" is the leitmotif that runs through many memoirs. "I'm not alive," "I see myself from outside this self, pretending to be alive...I'm living without being alive. I do what I must...I just don't feel myself living. My blood circulates as though it flowed through veins outside my body...I died in Auschwitz but no one knows it".*

# The Sacred Conspiracy

*Georges Bataille*

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*An already old and corrupt nation, courageously shaking off the yoke of its monarchical government in order to adopt a republican one, can only maintain itself through many crimes; for it is already in crime, and if it wants to move from crime to virtue, in other words from a violent state to a peaceful one, it would fall into an inertia, of which its certain ruin would soon be the result.*

de Sade

*What looks like politics, and imagines itself to be political, will one day unmask itself as a religious movement.*

Kierkegaard

*Today solitary, you who live apart, you one day will be a people. Those who have designated themselves will one day be a designated people, and from this people will be born the life that goes beyond man.*

Nietzsche

What we have started must not be confused with anything else, cannot be limited to the expression of a thought and still less to what is rightly considered art.

It is necessary to produce and to eat: many things are necessary that are still nothing, and so it is with political agitation.

Who dreams, before having struggled to the end, of relinquishing his place to men it is impossible to look at without feeling the need to destroy? If nothing can be found beyond political activity, human avidity will meet nothing but a void.

WE ARE FEROCIOUSLY RELIGIOUS and, to the extent that our existence is the condemnation of everything that is recognized today, an inner exigency demands that we be equally imperious.

What we are starting is a war.

It is time to abandon the world of the civilized and its light. It is too late to be reasonable and educated—which has led to a life without appeal. Secretly or not, it is necessary to become completely different, or to cease being.

The world to which we have belonged offers nothing to love outside of each individual insufficiency: its existence is limited to utility. A world that cannot be loved to the point of death—in the same way that a man loves a woman—represents only self-interest and the obligation to work. If it is compared to worlds gone by, it is hideous, and appears as the most failed of all. In past worlds, it was possible to lose oneself in ecstasy, which is impossible in our world of educated vulgarity. The advantages of civilization are offset by the way men profit from them: men today profit in order to become the most degraded beings that have ever existed.

Life has always taken place in a tumult without apparent cohesion, but it only finds its grandeur and its reality in ecstasy and in ecstatic love. He who tries to ignore or misunderstand ecstasy is an incomplete being whose thought is reduced to analysis. Existence is not only an agitated void, it is a dance that forces one to dance with fanaticism. Thought that does not have a dead fragment as its object has the inner existence of flames.

It is necessary to become sufficiently firm and unshaken so that the existence of the world of civilization finally appears uncertain.

It is useless to respond to those who are able to believe in the existence of this world and who take their authority from it; if they speak, it is possible to look at them without hearing them and, even when one looks at them, to "see" only what exists far behind them. It is necessary to refuse boredom and live only for fascination.

On this path, it is vain to become restless and seek to

attract those who have idle whims, such as passing the time, laughing, or becoming individually bizarre. It is necessary to go forward without looking back and without taking into account those who do not have the strength to forget immediate reality.

Human life is exhausted from serving as the head of, or the reason for, the universe. To the extent that it becomes this head and this reason, to the extent that it becomes necessary to the universe, it accepts servitude. If it is not free, existence becomes empty or neutral and, if it is free, it is in play. The Earth, as long as it only gave rise to cataclysms, trees, and birds, was a free universe; the fascination of freedom was tarnished when the Earth produced a being who demanded necessity as a law above the universe. Man, however, has remained free not to respond to any necessity; he is free to resemble everything that is not himself in the universe. He can set aside the thought that it is he or God who keeps the rest of things from being absurd.

Man has escaped from his head just as the condemned man has escaped from his prison. He has found beyond himself not God, who is the prohibition against crime, but a being who is unaware of prohibition. Beyond what I am, I meet a being who makes me laugh because he is headless; this fills me with dread because he is made of innocence and crime; he holds a steel weapon in his left hand, flames like those of a Sacred Heart in his right. He reunites in the same eruption Birth and Death. He is not a man. He is not a god either. He is not me but he is more than me: his stomach is the labyrinth in which he has lost himself, loses me with him, and in which I discover myself as him, in other words as a monster.

What I have thought or represented, I have not thought or represented alone. I am writing in a little cold house in a village of fishermen; a dog has just barked in the night. My room is next to the kitchen where André Masson is happily moving around and singing; at this very moment, as I write, he has just put on the phonograph a recording of the overture to *Don Giovanni*; more than anything else, the

overture to *Don Giovanni* ties my lot in life to a challenge that opens me to a rapturous escape from the self. At this very moment, I am watching this acephalic being, this intruder composed of two equally excited obsessions, become the "Tomb of Don Giovanni." When, a few days ago, I was with André Masson in this kitchen, seated, a glass of wine in my hand, he suddenly talked of his own death and the death of his family, his eyes fixed, suffering, almost screaming that it was necessary for it to become a tender and passionate death, screaming his hatred for a world that weighs down even on death with its employee's paw—and I was no longer able to doubt that the lot and the infinite tumult of human life were open to those who could no longer exist as empty eye sockets, but as seers swept away by an overwhelming dream they could not own.

*Tossa, April 29, 1936*



*We know all too well the tyranny of the clock. In "Horror Temporis," Bejamin Noys examines two aspects of time in relation to H.P. Lovecraft's writings: its terrifying rationality, and the mystical dimension of cosmic time. As Noys points out in the beginning of his essay, Lovecraft views time as "the most profoundly dramatic and grimly terrible thing in the universe" which is why it plays such a central role in his fiction. Perhaps the renewed interest in cosmic horror is a result of the mass anxiety over the demise of Man. Time features prominently in anarchist and nihilist thought as well, and it might be only prisoners (especially those on death row) who contemplate its hold on the human psyche more.*

*We may spend our lives trying to find meaning to the universe, but the universe will never try to find meaning in humanity, despite our belief in its righteousness. Horror Temporis is a good example of how the latest attraction to the philosophy of horror can nod to anarchist ideas about time and temporality, and the possible negation of scientific as well as manmade laws.*

# Horror Temporis

Benjamin Noys

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In his “Notes on Writing Weird Fiction” (1937) Lovecraft wrote that time played such a large part in his fiction because he found it “the most profoundly dramatic and grimly terrible thing in the universe.”<sup>9</sup> On the one hand, the horror of time is not simply the trifling matter of individual human finitude, but rather the recognition of scientific statements concerning cosmic timescales that precede and exceed the existence of humanity and life itself. Unlike Engels, who hoped against hope for future relief from the second law of thermodynamics,<sup>10</sup> Lovecraft only foresaw future extinction.

9 H.P. Lovecraft, “Notes on Writing Weird Fiction” (1937).

*MALACANDRA*. 2003. At <http://www.geocities.com/soho/cafe/1131/14notesen.htm>

10 As Engels puts it, in the vein of William Hope Hodgson’s *THE NIGHT LAND*, (1912): *Millions of years may elapse, hundreds of thousands of generations be born and die, but inexorably the time will come when the declining warmth of the sun will no longer suffice to melt the ice thrusting itself forward from the poles; when the human race, crowding more and more about the equator, will finally no longer suffice to melt the ice thrusting itself forward from the poles; when the human race, crowding more and more about the equator, find even there enough heat for life; when gradually even the last trace of organic life will vanish; and the earth, an extinct frozen globe like the moon, will circle in deepest darkness and in an ever narrower orbit about the equally extinct sun, and at last fall into it. Other planets will have preceded it, others will follow it; instead of the bright, warm solar system with its harmonious arrangement of members, only a cold, dead sphere will still pursue its lonely path through universal space. And what will happen to our solar system will happen sooner or later to all the other systems of our island universe; it will happen to all the other innumerable island universes, even to those the light of which will never reach the earth while there is a living human eye to receive it. And when such a solar system has completed its life history and succumbs to the fate of all that is finite, death, what then? Will the sun’s corpse roll on for all eternity through infinite space, and all the once infinitely diverse, differentiated natural forces pass for ever into one single form of morion, attraction? ‘Or’—as Secchi asks—‘do forces exist in nature which can re-convert the dead system into its original state of an incandescent nebula and re-awake*

A science that produces time as indifferent to humanity is thus the source of the *horror temporis*. On the other hand, he writes that his stories are concerned with achieving the “suspension or violation” of natural laws in order to probe “the infinite cosmic spaces beyond the radius of our sight and analysis.” This suspension seems to promise an oneiric mysticism in the Dunsanian vein that escapes “the prison-house of the known” into the “enchanted lands of incredible adventures and infinite possibilities”. Thus, we seem to be left with the paradox of a horror based on science that threatens to proceed through an insipid anti-scientific mysticism. But Lovecraft’s actual solution, at least in his great texts, was more inventive: the suspension of natural laws would produce a new materialism which liberates us into the experience of the horror of time in its subtraction from any law and any relation.<sup>11</sup>

The question is of “the mode of manifestation” of this operation, which Lovecraft regards as requiring an “object embodying the horror and phenomena observed.” His fiction works through images of these objects, through the domain of the imaginary, but only through the impasse where the imaginary touches upon the real. If scientific laws provide him with the final regulative guarantee of consistency then his fiction probes the inconsistency of “shattered natural law” and the inconsistency of the object. To achieve this ef-

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*it to new life? We do not know’.*

11 This obviously indexes the work of Quentin Meillassoux, in particular his paper “Subtraction and Contraction,” COLLAPSE III (2007): 63-107. Through a reading of Bergson and Deleuze, Meillassoux approaches a subtractive thinking of matter as “an infinite madness” in which, we would have to conceive what our life would be if all the movements of the earth, all the noises of the earth, all the smells, the tastes, all the light—of the earth and of elsewhere, came to us in a moment, in an instant—like an atrocious screaming tumult of all things, traversing us continuously and instantaneously.

Can we suggest that this is often the state of the Lovecraftian hero at the end of many of the stories? Can we also suggest, alongside Meillassoux, that this indicates the ruination of philosophy in ‘absolute communion’, to the point at which Lovecraft indicates the collapse of the philosophical into chaos?

fect requires the gradual purification of the object from the regulation of representation. In the case of time this process can be traced in the last of his great texts: "The Shadow Out of Time" (1936).<sup>12</sup> Here it is a matter of what kind of object constitutes the shadow that falls from the outside—not a mystical outside of completed alterity, the *tout Autre*, but a material "outside" which does not respond to the effect of law or to any correlation or relation to humanity.

That outside is named in the opening of the story as the "seething vortex of time." The preliminary image of the vortex obviously derives from Poe and his use of the vortex in the form of a whirlpool in a number of his stories. Take, for example, this description from "A Descent into the Maelström" (1841): "the interior surface of a funnel vast in circumference, prodigious in depth, and whose perfectly smooth sides might have been mistaken for ebony, but for the bewildering rapidity with which they spun around." In this case we have an image taken from nature that embodies a turbulent flow in excess of mechanistic materialism. This is nature itself as what Lacan would call *antiphysis*—a rotten, chaotic, fractured nature. Lovecraft radicalizes this impasse of nature by not containing it within nature as an emergent fracture. Instead, as the "seething vortex of time," the vortex becomes the chaotic space of the emergence of nature itself: the Outside. We no longer have a confined phenomenon, a hole in the imaginary through which the real surges. Lacan would state that while the real does not lack anything, it is full of holes and one can even make a vacuum in it.

The mode of manifestation proceeds through a number of supplementary objects of horror that embody the shadow that falls from outside. In the first instance the shadow falls on the story's narrator, Nathaniel Peaslee, when he suffers from a strange experience of amnesia between 1908 and 1913 (the same period as Lovecraft's own nervous breakdown). As the narrative unfolds, it soon

12 H.P. Lovecraft "The Shadow Out of Time" in H.P. Lovecraft, **THE H.P. LOVECRAFT OMNIBUS 3: THE HAUNTER OF THE DARK AND OTHER TALES** (London: Panther Books, 1985), 464-544.

becomes evident that Peaslee had his mind exchanged with a member of the Great Race—alien beings that lived on the earth fifty million years before mankind and that have mastered the secret of time. When Peaslee returns to his body he finds that “my conception of *time*—my ability to distinguish between consecutiveness and simultaneousness—seemed subtly disordered.” This disorder of time can be explained as a result of the transference or interference by the Great Race, but also by the impact of his realisation that for these alien creatures “there was no such thing as time in its humanly accepted sense.” During the period in which Lovecraft was writing, Heidegger and Bergson were trying to produce new concepts of time that would correlate, in however attenuated a fashion, with the human experience of time. What Lovecraft suggests is the detachment of time from any relation to humanity—proceeding without philosophy towards the real.

This, though, is only the first object of *horror temporis*. Despite the monstrous nature of these creatures, Lovecraft’s narrator evinces considerable sympathy for the Great Race and their project to gather knowledge, and secure their future survival, by this process of mind exchange. The organisation of their social system by “a sort of fascistic socialism” dominated by a clerisy implies a kind of cosmic Keynesian planner-State of the kind Lovecraft himself obviously approved. The crisis that State has to manage is the threat of the elder beings—the second object of horror. These “half polypous, utterly alien entities” are only partly material (here we see the purification of the object) and dominated the earth six hundred million years ago. The Great Race would subdue these creatures beneath the cities they had built and which were then occupied by the Great Race. The old mole of alien class struggle had literally gone underground only to sporadically erupt in revolutions “shocking beyond all description.” The final flight of the Great Race to new bodies would be caused by the “final successful irruption of the elder beings.”<sup>13</sup>

This little allegory of 1917 and the New Deal requires little deciphering, especially after China Mièville's reading of **AT THE MOUNTAINS OF MADNESS** (1931).<sup>14</sup> The layering of these two objects of horror can be found in Peaslee's exploration of the ancient city of the Great Race in the Australian desert, as he searches for definitive proof of his abduction. The city itself forms an abyss, parallel to the horror of the vortex, with its "vast chain of aeon-dead black gulfs". Within the abyssal city, however, there is a further abyss. This is one of the prisons of the "elder things": a "downward aperture" open and "yawning unguarded down to abysses past imagination." Returning back past the open trap door Peaslee stumbles and hears the resultant noise answered by "a shrill, whistling sound, like nothing else on earth, and beyond any adequate verbal description"—the sound of the elder beings. These "tides of abomination surging up through the cleft itself"<sup>15</sup> fill-out the abyss or vortex with a material presence. Unlike **AT THE MOUNTAINS OF MADNESS** we are not greeted with the appearance of these creatures; instead they remain signaled only by sound.

Therefore this filling-out of the abyss is withdrawn and we are faced with a further layer of the shadow. The alien whistling of the creatures calls up another fear, the fear of being "engulfed in a pandemonic vortex of loathsome sound and utter, materially tangible blackness."<sup>16</sup> The 'materiality' here is the subtractive or purified materiality of the vortex of seething time—the seething blackness of chaos. Recall "The Music of Erich Zann" (1921),<sup>17</sup> in which the mad music of Zann is played to ward off something worse: "the blackness of space illimitable; unimagined space alive with motion and music, and having no semblance of anything on earth."<sup>18</sup> The narrative had earlier made clear how even the

14 China Mièville, Introduction in H.P. Lovecraft, **AT THE MOUNTAINS OF MADNESS** (New York: The Modern Library, 2005), xi-xxv.

15 H.P. Lovecraft "The Shadow Out of Time", 526, 529, 534, 539, 541.

16 Ibid., 541.

17 H. P. Lovecraft "The Music of Erich Zann" in **OMNIBUS 3**, 335-345.

18 Ibid., 343-4.

horror of the elder beings is finite; the Great Race knows that these creatures “were slowly weakening with the aeons. Indeed, it was known that they would be quite dead in the time of the post-human beetle race which the fleeing minds would tenant.”<sup>19</sup> No consciousness, alien or human, subtends the seething vortex of time. Sound is then only the signal for the definitive rupture of the *musica universalis*—and the revelation of the real *qua* chaos—compact but full of holes. But this effect is withdrawn. The final “shattering” revelation of Lovecraft’s narrative is the—by now for the reader, entirely predictable—recovery by the narrator of a text from the depths of the alien city written in his own hand. This forms the definitive proof that “there lies upon this world of man a shocking and incredible shadow out of time.” In this revelation we witness the retraction of the horror back towards the constraints of the object. Lovecraft himself remained dissatisfied with the story and refused to type it up. If every critical reading is a kind of rewriting, and often, as in this case, something of the expression of the text we desired rather than the text we have, then what I desire is that “terrible thing”: a fiction of the “seething vortex of time.” I, Nathaniel Peaslee, have found that last proof of my otherness written in my own hand. But then this textual proof serves to keep me guarded as one of the chosen of the Great Race. I is another, another subject. We might all be doomed but I, Nathaniel Peaslee, have had the honour of being chosen as a great mind who will be recorded.

Something, however, whispers in poor Nathaniel’s ear: What about the shadow out of time? You presume that the shadow comes from outside. You suggest, implicitly, some stable and material outside that forms the flipside of existent reality. I come with the good bad news, the shadow out of time does not exist outside time, it is time. Time itself is the shadowy vortex of a ‘matter’ that forms nothing and has no need of you, anyone or anything else. Good night, Nathaniel, and good luck.



*Each concession we make is accompanied by  
an inner diminution of which we are not im-  
mediately conscious.*

Emil Cioran,  
"Stabs At Bewilderment"  
DRAWN AND QUARTERED

# The Two Truths

E.M. Cioran

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*... It is closing-time in the gardens of the West.*

Cyril Connolly

According to a Gnostic legend, a war broke out in heaven among the angels, in which Michael's legions defeated those of the Dragon. The nonpartisan angels who had been content to look on were consigned to earth, in order to make there a choice they had not been able to determine on high, one all the more arduous in that they brought with them no memory of the combat or, indeed, of their equivocal attitude.

Thus history's commencement can be traced to a qualm, and man resulted from an original ... vacillation, from that incapacity, before his banishment, to take sides. Cast to earth in order to learn how to choose, he was condemned to action, to risk, and was apt for it only insofar as he stifled the spectator in himself. Heaven alone permits neutrality to a certain point, while history, quite the contrary, appears to be the punishment of those who, before their incarnation, had found no reason to join one camp rather than another. We realize why human beings are so eager to espouse causes, to club together, to rally round a truth. Around what kind of truth?

In later Buddhism, especially in the Madya-mika school, emphasis is placed on the radical opposition between real truth or paramartha, attribute of the delivered, and ordinary truth or samvriti, "veiled" truth or more exactly "truth of error," privilege or curse of the nonliberated.

Real truth, which assumes every risk, including that of the negation of all truth and of the idea of truth itself, is the prerogative of the inactive, who deliberately put themselves outside the sphere of action and for whom only the apprehension (whether instantaneous or methodical is of no importance) of insubstantiality matters, an apprehension

accompanied by no feeling of frustration, rather the contrary, for access to nonreality implies a mysterious enrichment. For them history will be a bad dream to which they resign themselves, for nightmares are not a matter of choice. In order to grasp the essence of the historical process, or rather its lack of essence, we must acknowledge that all posthistorical truths are truths of error because they attribute a proper nature to what possesses nothing of the kind, a substance to what cannot have one. The theory of a double truth permits us to discern the place history occupies in the scale of unrealities, paradise of sleepwalkers, galloping obnubilation. The truth is, history does not quite lack essence, since it is the essence of deception, key to all that blinds us, all that helps us live in time.

Sarvakarmaphalatyâga ... Years ago, having written this spellbinding word in capital letters on a sheet of paper, I had tacked it to the wall of my room so I could stare at it throughout the day. It remained there for months, until I finally took it down because I realized I was becoming more and more attached to its magic and less and less to its content. Yet what it signifies: detachment from the fruit of action, is of such importance that anyone who had truly possessed himself of it would have nothing more to accomplish, since he would have reached the one valid end, the real truth that annihilates all the others and exposes their emptiness, being empty itself, moreover—but this emptiness is conscious of itself. Imagine a greater awareness, a further step toward awakening, and he who takes it will be no more than a ghost, a phantom.

When we have reached this limit-truth, we begin to cut a wretched figure in history, which mingles with the sum of the truths of error, dynamic truths whose principle, of course, is illusion. Awakened men, the disabused, inevitably infirm, cannot be the focus of events precisely because they have glimpsed their inanity. The interference of the two truths is fertile for awakening but fatal to action. It marks the beginning of a collapse, as much for an individual as for

a civilization or even for a race.

Before awakening, one experiences hours of euphoria, of irresponsibility, of intoxication. But after the abuse of illusion comes satiety. The awakened is severed from everything, he is the ex-fanatic par excellence, who can no longer endure the burden of chimeras, whether enticing or grotesque. So far removed is he from them that he does not understand by what distraction he could have been infatuated. It is thanks to chimeras that he had shone, that he had asserted himself. Now his past, like his future, seems scarcely imaginable. He has wasted his substance, in the fashion of those peoples who, worshiping the demon of mobility, develop too fast, and who, by dint of liquidating idols, end by no longer having any in reserve. Charron<sup>20</sup> once noted that ten years in Florence encompassed more excitement and more disorder than five hundred years in the Grisons, from which he concluded that a community can subsist only if it manages to lay the mind to rest.

Archaic societies have lasted so long because they know nothing of the desire to innovate, to grovel before ever-new simulacra. If you change images with each generation, you cannot anticipate historical longevity. Classical Greece and modern Europe typify civilizations stricken by a precocious death, following a greed for metamorphosis and an excessive consumption of gods, and of the surrogates for gods. Ancient China and Egypt wallowed for millennia in a magnificent sclerosis. As did African societies, before contact with the West. They too are threatened, because they have adopted another rhythm. Having lost the monopoly on stagnation, they grow increasingly frantic and will inevitably topple like their models, like those feverish civilizations incapable of lasting more than a dozen centuries. In the future, the peoples who accede to hegemony will enjoy it even less: history in slow motion has inexorably been replaced by history out of breath. Who can help regretting the pharaohs and their Chinese colleagues?

Institutions, societies, civilizations differ in duration

and significance, yet all are subject to one and the same law, which decrees that the invincible impulse, the factor of their rise, must sag and settle after a certain time, this decadence corresponding to a slackening of that energizer which is ... delirium. Compared with periods of expansion, of dementia really, those of decline seem sane and are so, are too much so—which makes them almost as deadly as the others.

A nation that has fulfilled itself, that has expended its talents and exploited the last resources of its genius, expiates such success by producing nothing thereafter. It has done its duty, it aspires to vegetate, but to its cost it will not have the latitude to do so. When the Romans—or what remained of them—sought repose, the Barbarians got under way, *en masse*. We read in a history of the invasions that the German tribes serving in the Empire's army and administration assumed Latin names until the middle of the fifth century. After which, Germanic names became a requirement. Exhausted, in retreat on every front, the masters were no longer feared, no longer respected. What was the use of bearing their names? "A fatal somnolence reigned everywhere," observed Salvian, bitterest censor of the ancient deliquescence in its final stages.

In the Métro, one evening, I looked closely around me: everyone had come from somewhere else ... Among us, though, two or three faces from here, embarrassed silhouettes that seemed to be apologizing for their presence. The same spectacle in London.

Today's migrations are no longer made by compact displacements but by successive infiltrations: little by little, individuals insinuate themselves among the "natives," too anemic and too distinguished to stoop to the notion of a "territory." After a thousand years of vigilance, we open the gates ... When one thinks of the long rivalries between the French and the English, then between the French and the Germans, it seems as if each nation, by weakening one another, had as its task to speed the hour of the common downfall so that other specimens of humanity may relay

them. Like its predecessor, the new Völkerwanderung will provoke an ethnic confusion whose phases cannot be distinctly foreseen. Confronted with these disparate profiles, the notion of a community homogeneous to whatever degree is inconceivable. The very possibility of so heteroclit a crowd suggests that in the space it occupies there no longer existed, among the indigenous, any desire to safeguard even the shadow of an identity. At Rome, in the third century of our era, out of a million inhabitants, only sixty thousand were of Latin stock. Once a people has fulfilled the historical idea which was its mission to incarnate, it no longer has any excuse to preserve its difference, to cherish its singularity, to safeguard its features amid a chaos of faces.

Having governed two hemispheres, the West is now becoming their laughingstock: subtle specters, end of the line in the literal sense, doomed to the status of pariahs, of flabby and faltering slaves, a status which perhaps the Russians will escape, those last White Men. Because they still have some pride, that motor, no, that cause of history. When a nation runs out of pride, when it ceases to regard itself as the reason or excuse for the universe, it excludes itself from becoming. It has understood—for its well-being or woe, depending on each one's perspective. If it now constitutes the despair of the ambitious, on the other hand it fascinates the meditative who happen to be a touch depraved. Dangerously advanced nations are the only ones that deserve interest, especially when we sustain ambiguous relations with Time and court Clio out of a need to punish ourselves. Moreover it is this need that incites us to undertake ... anything, great or insignificant. Each of us labors against his interests: we are not conscious of this so long as we work, but examine any period and we see that action and sacrifice are almost always undertaken for a virtual or a declared enemy: the men of the Revolution for Bonaparte, Bonaparte for the Bourbons, the Bourbons for the Orleanists ... Can history inspire only sneers—has it no goal? Yes, more than one, many in fact, but it achieves them in reverse. The phenomenon is universally verifiable. We realize the opposite of what we

have pursued, we advance counter to the splendid lie we have made to ourselves; whence the interest of biographies, least boring of the suspect genres. The will has never served anyone: the most arguable of our productions is what we cling to most tenaciously, the motive for inflicting our worst privations on ourselves. This is true of a writer as well as of a conqueror, of any man in the street. The end of "anyone" suggests as many reflexions as the end of an empire, or of man himself, so proud of having acceded to the vertical position and so apprehensive of losing it, of returning to his earliest aspect, of concluding his career, in short, as he had begun it: stooping and shaggy. Over each being hangs the threat of regressing to his point of departure (as though to illustrate the uselessness of his trajectory, of any trajectory), and he who succeeds in evading it gives the impression of scamping a duty, of refusing to play the game by inventing an overly paradoxical mode of failure.

The role of periods of decline is to lay a civilization bare, to unmask it, to strip it of the glamour and arrogance linked to its achievements. Thereby it can discern what it was worth and is worth now, what was illusory in its efforts and its convulsions. Insofar as it detaches itself from the fictions that guaranteed its fame, it will take a considerable stride toward knowledge... toward disillusion, toward a generalized awakening, that fatal promotion that will project it outside of history (unless it is "awakened" simply by having ceased to be present there, to excel there). The universalization of awakening, fruit of lucidity, itself fruit of the erosion of reflexes, is the sign of emancipation in the order of the mind and of capitulation in the order of action, of history, in fact, itself no more than an acknowledgment of collapse: as soon as we turn our eyes upon history, we are in the situation of a dismayed spectator. The mechanical correlation established between history and meaning is the perfect example of the truth of error. History involves a meaning, if you like, but this meaning constantly belies and refutes it and thereby makes history piquant and sinister, pitiable

and grandiose, in short, irresistibly demoralizing. Who would take history seriously if it were not the very road to degradation? The mere fact of being concerned with it tells everything about what it is, one's consciousness of history being, according to Erwin Reisner, a symptom of the end of time (*Geschichtshewusstsein ist Symptom der Endzeit*). We cannot, as it turns out, be obsessed with history without falling into an obsession with its conclusion. The theologian reflects on events with a view to the Last Judgment; the anxious man (or the prophet), with a view to a less sumptuous but quite as important decor. Both anticipate a calamity analogous to the one that the Delaware Indians projected into the past, and during which, according to their traditions, not only men prayed in terror, but the beasts as well. "And the periods of calm?" it will be objected. Undeniably they exist, though serenity is but a brilliant nightmare, no more than a Calvary that has come off.

Impossible to concede that the tragic is the individual's lot, and not that of history. Far from escaping it, history is subject to the tragic and marked by it even more than the tragic hero himself, the way it will come out being at the center of the curiosity it provokes. We are fascinated by history because we know by instinct what surprises lie in wait for it, and what splendid issue it offers to apprehension ... For an informed mind, however, it adds little to the insoluble, to the original no-exit. Like tragedy, history resolves nothing, because there is nothing to resolve. It is always by failure that we study the future. Too bad we cannot breathe as if events, in their totality, were suspended! Each time they evidence themselves a little too much, we suffer a fit of determinism, of fatalistic rage. By free will we explain only the surface of history, the appearances it assumes, its external vicissitudes, but not its depths, its real course, which preserves, in spite of everything, a baffling, even a mysterious character. We are still amazed that Hannibal, after Cannae, did not fall upon Rome. Had he done so, we should be boasting today of our Carthaginian ancestry. To maintain that

whim, that accident, hence the individual, play no part, is folly. Yet each time we envisage the future as a totality, the verdict of the Mahahharata invariably comes to mind: "The knot of Destiny cannot be untied; nothing in this world is the result of our actions."

Victims of a double sorcery, torn between the two truths, doomed to be unable to choose one without immediately regretting the other, we are too clear-sighted not to be deflated, disabused of illusion and of the lack of illusion, hence close to Ranee,<sup>21</sup> who, a prisoner of his past, devoted his hermit's existence to arguing with those he had left behind, with the authors of lampoons who had questioned the sincerity of his conversion and the justice of his enterprises, thereby showing that it was easier to reform the Trappist Order than to abstain from the world. Similarly, nothing easier than to denounce history; on the other hand, nothing more arduous than to win free of it, for it is from history that we emerge and it will not let us forget it. History is the obstacle to ultimate revelation, the shackle we can strike off only if we have perceived the nullity of every event except the one that this very perception represents, and thanks to which we attain at moments to "the real truth," i.e., to the victory over all truths. It is then that we understand Mommsen's<sup>22</sup> words: "A historian must be like God, he must love everyone and everything, even the devil." In other words, cease to prefer, occupy yourself with absence, with the obligation to be nothing ever again. We may imagine the delivered as a historian suddenly stricken with intemporality.

Our only choice is between irrespirable truths and salutary frauds. The truths that allow of no existence alone deserve the name of truths. Superior to the exigencies of the living, they do not condescend to be our accomplices. They are "inhuman" truths, truths of vertigo, and we reject them because no one can do without props disguised as slogans

21      Seventeenth-century French religious reformer.

22      Nineteenth-century German historian.

or as gods. What is painful is to see that in each period it is the iconoclasts or those who claim to be such who most often resort to fictions and to lies. The ancient world must have been terribly afflicted to need so crude an antidote as the one Christianity was to administer. The modern world is just as badly off, judging by the remedies from which it expects miracles. Epicurus, the least fanatic of the wise, was the great loser then, as he is today. One is filled with amazement and even with dread when one hears men speak of freeing Man. How might slaves free the Slave? And how to believe that history—a procession of delusions—can drag on much longer? Soon it will be closing time in the gardens everywhere.

*I can admire aesthetically War and Peace by Tolstoy and not share the ideological substance of the book; if the two events coincide Tolstoy would be my handbook, "le livre de chevet". So you can say to Shakespeare, Goethe, and Dante. It would not be accurate to say the same for Leopardi, despite his pessimism. In Leopardi is located, in a very dramatic form, the crisis of transition to modern man; the critical abandonment of the old transcendental conceptions that still has not found a new moral and intellectual place to stand, which gives the same certainty of what was abandoned.*

Antonio Gramsci,  
Letter from prison to Carissima Iulca,  
September 5, 1932

*The pessimism of Giacomo Leopardi is interesting for its grounding in the classics and naturalism as well as for his preference for representing it in lyrical and poetic forms, expressing some of the least pleasant ideas in the same beautiful colors as the happier thoughts they trouble. His "Dialogue Between Nature And An Icelander" marks the turn in his perspective toward pessimism and a delightful attack on the centricity of humanity in the world. Following the dialogue are some selections from his personal notebooks, the Zibaldone di pensieri, from the time of its publication in 1824 until his death. These selections include such things as his musings on the strength of madmen and children, the horror show of gardens, and the tragic nonsense of endeavoring to illuminate the world in the light of human understanding. Leopardi, like Zapffe a century later, marks out a pessimism that finds its beginning in meaninglessness and ends in laughter.*

# Dialogue between Nature and an Icelander

*Giacomo Leopardi*

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An Icelander who had travelled over most of the earth, and had lived in very many different lands, found himself one day in the heart of Africa. As he crossed the equator in a place never before penetrated by man, he had an adventure like that which happened to Vasco di Gama, who, when passing the Cape of Good Hope, was opposed by two giants, the guardians of the southern seas, that tried to prevent his entrance into the new waters.<sup>23</sup> The Icelander saw in the distance a huge bust, in appearance like the colossal Hermes he had formerly seen in the Isle of Pasqua. At first he thought it was made of stone, but as he drew near to it he saw that the head belonged to an enormous woman, who was seated on the ground, resting her back against a mountain. The figure was alive, and had a countenance both magnificent and terrible, and eyes and hair of a jet black colour. She looked fixedly at him for a long time in silence. At length she said:

**NATURE**—Who art thou? What doest thou here, where thy race is unknown?

**ICELANDER**—I am a poor Icelander, fleeing from Nature. I have fled from her ever since I was a child, through a hundred different parts of the world, and I am fleeing from her now.

**NATURE**—So flees the squirrel from the rattlesnake, and runs in its haste deliberately into the mouth of its tormentor. I am that from which thou fleest.

**ICELANDER**—Nature?

**NATURE**—Even so.

**ICELANDER**—I am smitten with anguish, for I consider no

worse misfortune could befall me.

NATURE—Thou mightest well have imagined that I was to be found in countries where my power is supremest. But why dost thou shun me?

ICELANDER—You must know that from my earliest youth, experience convinced me of the vanity of life, and the folly of men. I saw these latter ceaselessly struggling for pleasures that please not, and possessions that do not satisfy. I saw them inflict on themselves, and voluntarily suffer, infinite pains, which, unlike the pleasures, were only too genuine. In short, the more ardently they sought happiness, the further they seemed removed from it. These things made me determine to abandon every design, to live a life of peace and obscurity, harming no one, striving in nought to better my condition, and contesting nothing with anyone. I despaired of happiness, which I regarded as a thing withheld from our race, and my only aim was to shield myself from suffering. Not that I had the least intention of abstaining from work, or bodily labour; for there is as great a difference between mere fatigue and pain, (2)<sup>24</sup> as between a peaceful and an idle life. But when I began to carry out my project, I learnt from experience how fallacious it is to think that one can live inoffensively amongst men without offending them. Though I always gave them precedence, and took the smallest part of everything, I found neither rest nor happiness among them. However, this I soon remedied. By avoiding men I freed myself from their persecutions. I took refuge in solitude—easily obtainable in my native island. Having done this, I lived without a shadow of enjoyment; yet I found I had not escaped all suffering. The intense cold of the long winter, and the extreme heat of summer, characteristic of the country, allowed me no cessation from pain. And when, to warm myself, I passed much time by the fire, I was scorched by the flames, and blinded by the smoke. I suffered continuously, whether in the open air, or in the shelter of my cabin. In

24 Cicero says: "Labour and pain are not identical. Labour is a toilsome function of body or mind—pain an unpleasant disturbance in the body. When they cut Marius' veins, it was pain; when he marched at the head of the troops in a great heat, it was labour." *Tusc. Quaest.*

short, I failed to obtain that life of peace which was my one desire. Terrible storms, Hecla's menaces and rumblings, and the constant fires which occur among the wooden houses of my country, combined to keep me in a state of perpetual disquietude. Such annoyances as these, trivial though they be when the mind is distracted by the thoughts and actions of social and civil life, are intensified by solitude. I endured them all, together with the hopeless monotony of my existence, solely in order to obtain the tranquillity I desired. I perceived that the more I isolated myself from men, and confined me to my own little sphere, the less I succeeded in protecting myself from the discomforts and sufferings of the outer world.

Then I determined to try other climates and countries, to see if anywhere I could live in peace, harming no one, and exist without suffering, if also without pleasure. I was urged to this by the thought that perhaps you had destined for the human race a certain part of the earth (as you have for many animals and plants), where alone they could live in comfort. In which case it was our own fault if we suffered inconvenience from having exceeded our natural boundaries. I have therefore been over the whole earth, testing every country, and always fulfilling my intention of troubling others in the least possible degree, and seeking nothing for myself but a life of tranquillity. But in vain. The tropical sun burnt me; the Arctic cold froze me; in temperate regions the changeability of the weather troubled me; and everywhere I have experienced the fury of the elements. I have been in places where not a day passes without a storm, and where you, Nature, are incessantly at war with simple people who have never done you any harm. In other places cloudless skies are compensated for by frequent earthquakes, active volcanoes, and subterranean commotions. Elsewhere hurricanes and whirlwinds take the place of other scourges. Sometimes I have heard the roof over my head groan with the burden of snow that it supported; at other times the earth, saturated with rain, has broken away beneath my feet. Rivers have burst their banks, and pursued me, fleeing at full speed, as

though I were an enemy. Wild beasts tried to devour me, without the least provocation on my part. Serpents have sought to poison or crush me; and I have been nearly killed by insects. I make no mention of the daily hazards by which man is surrounded. These last are so numerous that an ancient philosopher (3)<sup>25</sup> laid down a rule, that to resist the constant influence of fear, it were well to fear everything.

Again, sickness has not failed to torment me, though invariably temperate, and even abstemious, in all bodily pleasures. In truth, our natural constitution is an admirably arranged affair! You inspire us with a strong and incessant yearning for pleasure, deprived of which our life is imperfect; and on the other hand you ordain that nothing should be more opposed to physical health and strength, more calamitous in its effects, and more incompatible with the duration of life itself, than this same pleasure. But although I indulged in no pleasures, numerous diseases attacked me, some of which endangered my life, and others the use of my limbs, thus threatening me with even an access of misery. All, during many days or months, caused me to experience a thousand bodily and mental pangs. And, whereas in sickness we endure new and extraordinary sufferings, as though our ordinary life were not sufficiently unhappy; you do not compensate for this by giving us equally exceptional periods of health and strength, and consequent enjoyment. In regions where the snow never melts, I lost my sight; this is an ordinary occurrence among the Laplanders in their cold country. The sun and air, things necessary for life, and therefore unavoidable, trouble us continually; the latter by its dampness or severity, the former by its heat, and even its light; and to neither of them can man remain exposed without suffering more or less inconvenience or harm. In short, I cannot recollect a single day during which I have not suffered in some way; whereas, on the other hand, the days that have gone by without a shadow of enjoyment are countless. I conclude therefore that we are destined to suffer much in proportion as we enjoy little, and that it is as impossible to live peace-

fully as happily. I also naturally come to the conclusion that you are the avowed enemy of men, and all other creatures of your creation. Sometimes alluring, at other times menacing; now attacking, now striking, now pursuing, now destroying; you are always engaged in tormenting us. Either by habit or necessity you are the enemy of your own family, and the executioner of your own flesh and blood. As for me, I have lost all hope. Experience has proved to me that though it be possible to escape from men and their persecutions, it is impossible to evade you, who will never cease tormenting us until you have trodden us under foot. Old age, with all its bitterness, and sorrows, and accumulation of troubles, is already near to me. This worst of evils you have destined for us and all created beings, from the time of infancy. From the fifth lustre of life, decline makes itself manifest; its progress we are powerless to stay. Scarce a third of life is spent in the bloom of youth; but few moments are claimed by maturity; all the rest is one gradual decay, with its attendant evils.

NATURE—Thinkest thou then that the world was made for thee? It is time thou knewest that in my designs, operations, and decrees, I never gave a thought to the happiness or unhappiness of man. If I cause you to suffer, I am unaware of the fact; nor do I perceive that I can in any way give you pleasure. What I do is in no sense done for your enjoyment or benefit, as you seem to think. Finally, if I by chance exterminated your species, I should not know it.

ICELANDER—Suppose a stranger invited me to his house in a most pressing manner, and I, to oblige him, accepted his invitation. On my arrival he took me to a damp and unhealthy place, and lodged me in a chamber open to the air, and so ruinous that it threatened momentarily to collapse and crush me. Far from endeavouring to amuse me, and make me comfortable, he neglected to provide me with even the necessities of life. And more than this. Suppose my host caused me to be insulted, ridiculed, threatened, and beaten by his sons and household. And on my complaining to him of such ill-treatment, he replied: "Dost thou think I made this house for thee? Do I keep these my children and servants

for thy service? I assure thee I have other things to occupy me, than that I should amuse thee, or give thee welcome." To which I answered: "Well, my friend, though you may not have built your house especially for me, at least you might have forborne to ask me hither. And, since I owe it to you that I am here, ought I not to rely on you to assure me, if possible, a life free from trouble and danger?"

Thus I reply to you. I am well aware you did not make the world for the service of men. It were easier to believe that you made it expressly as a place of torment for them. But tell me: why am I here at all? Did I ask to come into the world? Or am I here unnaturally, contrary to your will? If however, you yourself have placed me here, without giving me the power of acceptance or refusal of this gift of life, ought you not as far as possible to try and make me happy, or at least preserve me from the evils and dangers, which render my sojourn a painful one? And what I say of myself, I say of the whole human race, and of every living creature. NATURE—Thou forgettest that the life of the world is a perpetual cycle of production and destruction, so combined that the one works for the good of the other. By their joint operation the universe is preserved. If either ceased, the world would dissolve. Therefore, if suffering were removed from the earth, its own existence would be endangered. ICELANDER—So say all the philosophers. But since that which is destroyed suffers, and that which is born from its destruction also suffers in due course, and finally is in its turn destroyed, would you enlighten me on one point, about which hitherto no philosopher has satisfied me? For whose pleasure and service is this wretched life of the world maintained, by the suffering and death of all the beings which compose it?

Whilst they discussed these and similar questions, two lions are said to have suddenly appeared. The beasts were so enfeebled and emaciated with hunger that they were scarcely able to devour the Icelander. They accomplished the feat however, and thus gained sufficient strength to live to the end of the day. But certain people dispute this fact.

They affirm that a violent wind having arisen, the unfortunate Icelander was blown to the ground, and soon overwhelmed beneath a magnificent mausoleum of sand. Here his corpse was remarkably preserved, and in process of time he was transformed into a fine mummy. Subsequently, some travellers discovered the body, and carried it off as a specimen, ultimately depositing it in one of the museums of Europe.

# Selections from the Zibaldone

*Giacomo Leopardi*

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In the DIALOGO DELLA NATURA E DELL'ANIMA, I have considered how reason and imagination, indeed all the mental faculties which are excellent in man above every other living creature, are the cause of his never being able or hardly ever, and in any case with difficulty, to make use of all his natural forces, as all the other animals do every day without any difficulty. Add. People say madmen have extraordinary strength, which no one can resist, especially face to face. It is thought it is their illness in itself which gives such strength, unlike all other infirmities. Is it not clear that it comes from their not having any impediment in themselves to using all their natural forces? That madmen have more force than other people just because they use all those they have, or most of them which others do not? In fact exactly like an animal. From which I deduce: how many animals which are said to be physically stronger than man, actually are not! How much of his forces must man have lost because of the progress of the human spirit, not only in a radical sense, but because he has been impeded in the use of the little that does remain! How much stronger man is, even corrupted and weakened, than he thinks he is. Madmen prove it, who with their physical forces often overcome people who are much more robust than they are, and animals that are generally thought to be stronger than man when they are up against one another. Drunkenness increases strength not only radically, but also negatively since it impedes and disturbs the use of reason. Unless there is a total lack or suspension of this use, no man, even the most unreflective one, even a child, even a savage, even a desperate man (all of whom, however, as we know from experience have or seem

to have proportionately much more strength than their opposites) uses, even in the moment of his greatest need, or greatest danger, exactly all the forces he has in all their kinds and to their full extent. Not so animals: or certainly they save infinitely less of their forces, even when there is least danger, need, desire, intention, than man does, even the most desperate one, etc., in the greatest dangers.—23 Apr. 1824. What has been said about madmen may be said equally in due proportion about desperate people.

Man would be omnipotent if he could be desperate the whole of his life, or at least for a long time, that is, if his desperation were a state that could last.

21 May 1824

Regarding what I said elsewhere about animals and mad people who, unlike men, exert all of their energies in order to achieve their ends, here I would add children, who sometimes win out over grown men with true, living energy, etc.

4 May 1829, Recanati

There was someone who used to say that it was incorrect to make the common affirmation that it takes no more than appearance, e.g., for a man of letters to be esteemed, even though he may lack substance. Now appearance not only suffices, it is the only thing that suffices, and it is necessary and all that is necessary. Because substance without appearance makes no impression at all and achieves nothing and appearance with substance does not do anything or achieve anything more than without it. So you see that substance is pointless, and it all has to do only with appearance.

1 June 1824

Not only, as I said elsewhere, did any barbarous century think themselves to be so, but every century thought and thinks it is the *non plus ultra* as far as the progress of the human mind is concerned, and that it is hard and nearly impossible for future centuries, certainly not past ones, to surpass it in knowledge of things, discoveries, etc., and especially in civilization.

10 October, Sunday, 1824

Likewise there is no nation or small community so barbarous or savage that it does not think it is first among nations, and its state, the most perfect, civilized, happy, and that that of all the other nations is worse the more it is different from its own. See Robertson, *STORIA D'AMERICA*, Venice 1794, tome 2, pp. 126, 232-33.<sup>1</sup> Likewise nations half or imperfectly civilized, even in Europe, etc. And it was ever thus.

15 October, *Feast of St. Teresa of Avila, 1824*

The whole of nature lacks sensation, with the exception of animals. And they alone are unhappy, and not being is better for them than being, or rather not living than living. Less unhappy, though, the less sensitive they are (both species and individuals) and vice versa. The whole of nature, and the eternal order of things is not aimed in any way at all at the happiness of sensitive beings and animals. In fact it is quite the opposite. Nor is their own nature and the eternal order of their being aimed at it. Sensitive beings are naturally *souffrants* [suffering], a part of the universe that is essentially *souffrante*. Since they do exist and their species perpetuate themselves, it must be said that they are a necessary link in the great chain of beings, and in the order and the existence of this universe as it is, to which their harm is useful, since their existence is harmful to them, being essentially a *souffrance*. Therefore this necessity of their being is an imperfection of nature, and the universal order, an essential and eternal imperfection, not one that is accidental. If however the *souffrance* of the smallest part of nature, which is the whole of the animal genus taken together, deserves to be called an imperfection. At least it is a very small part and like the tiniest speck in universal nature in the order and existence of the whole universe. The tiniest because animals in relation to the sum total of all other beings, and to the immensity of the whole universe are nothing. And if we consider them as the principal part of everything there is, the beings most worthy of consideration, and so not as the tiniest but greatest part, because great in value if small in extension, this judgment of ours comes from

the way we consider things, weigh up the relations between them, appraise them comparatively, assess and regard the great system of everything; a natural way of judging for us who are ourselves part of the animal and sensitive genus, but not a true one, nor one founded on independent and absolute grounds, nor one which fits the reality of things, or conforms to the judgment and to the way of thinking (if we can call it that) of universal nature, or corresponds to the way the world works, or to the fact that all nature, except this smallest part of it, lacks sensation, and that sensitive beings are necessarily *souffrants*, and always more so the more sensitive they are. Hence we really ought to conclude, that they themselves, or sensitivity in an abstract sense, are an imperfection of nature, or rather that they are the last, the lowest in degree in terms both of nobility and dignity in the succession of beings and properties of things.

*9 April, Saturday after Easter, 1825*

Now, more than ever before, society contains seeds of destruction and has characteristics which are incompatible with its preservation and existence, and that is mainly owing to knowledge of the truth, and to philosophy. Indeed all the latter has done, especially for the multitude, is to teach and establish negative not positive truths, that is to destroy prejudice, in a word to take and not to give. It has purified their minds and taken them back to something like the state of nature as far as kinds of knowledge are concerned, where there are no or very few of the prejudices it has destroyed. How then has it done any harm to society? The truth, meaning the absence of this or that error, how can that be harmful? Harmful though it may be to know some truths hidden from us by nature, how can it be harmful to purify men from errors they did not naturally have, and that a child does not have? This is how I reply: man in nature does not have even close-knit society. The errors that are not necessary to man in his natural state may be necessary to him in the social state; he did not have them naturally; that does not prove anything; he did not have a thousand other things that he

has need of to conserve the social state. To take man back to his natural condition in some respects, while leaving him at the same time in society, may not be good, may be very harmful, because a certain part of his natural condition may be repugnant to the state of close-knit society, which anyway does not exist in nature. Many medicines are not natural, but just as the diseases they are a remedy for do not exist in nature, they may be appropriate for man, once those diseases do exist. Illusions are not natural, but their destruction has destroyed the love for one's country, for glory, for virtue, etc. Then universal egoism is born, in fact reborn. Egoism is natural, it is characteristic of man: all children, all real savages are genuine egoists. But egoism is incompatible with society. The effective return to a natural state in this respect is destructive of the social state. The same may be said for religion, and likewise for a thousand other things. I conclude that philosophy which frees human life from a thousand nonnatural errors that society has given birth to (naturally), philosophy which brings the intellects of the multitude back to a state of natural purity, and man to a natural way of thinking of and doing many things, may be and actually is, harmful and destructive of society, because those errors may be, and actually are, necessary to the subsistence and preservation of society, which has always had them in some way or another in the past, and among all peoples; and because that purity and that natural state, excellent in themselves, may be harmful to man, given society; and society may not be able to survive in their company, or may survive in the worst way, as is happening in fact at present.

*18 April 1825*

Since happiness does not seem to be able to exist except in beings conscious of themselves, that is living beings, and such consciousness of oneself cannot be conceived of without self-love, and self-love necessarily desires an infinite good, and it does not seem that that can exist in the world, it follows that not only men and animals, but any being at all, cannot be or is happy, that happiness (which by its nature

could not be any other than good or rather an infinite pleasure) is by its nature impossible, and that the universe is by its nature incapable of happiness, which turns out to be a being of reason and a pure product of man's imagination. And since moreover the absence of happiness in beings who love themselves implies unhappiness, it follows that life, or rather the feeling of this existence divided among all the beings of the universe, is by its nature, and by virtue of the eternal order and of the mode of being of things, inseparable from and almost the same as unhappiness and implies unhappiness, hence to live and to be unhappy are almost synonymous.

*3 May, Feast of the Finding of the Holy Cross, 1825*

It is perhaps little or not at all or not often enough observed that hope is a passion, a way of being, so inherent and inseparable from the feeling of life, that is from life itself, like thought, and like the love of oneself, and the desire for one's own good. I live, therefore I hope, is an extremely accurate syllogism, except when we are not aware of life, as in sleep, etc. Desperation, strictly speaking, does not exist, and is as impossible for every living being, as true hatred of oneself is. Anyone who kills himself is not really without hope, any more than he really hates himself, or does not love himself. We always have hope in each moment of our life. Each moment is a thought, and so each moment is in a way an act of desire, and an act of hope as well, an act which is always logically distinguishable from, but nonetheless in practice usually almost identical with, the act of desire, and hope is almost identical with, or certainly inseparable from, desire.

*Bologna, 18 October 1825*

What is life? The journey of a crippled and sick man walking with a heavy load on his back up steep mountains and through wild, rugged, arduous places, in snow, ice, rain, wind, burning sun, for many days without ever resting night and day to end at a precipice or ditch, in which inevitably he falls.

*Bologna, 17 Jan. 1826*

Very often, like a sick person, a convalescent taking care of himself, a poor man struggling to find food, using infinite patience just to survive, we suffer just in order to survive, so as not to lose our ability to suffer, and we are patient in order to preserve our ability to be so, and to continue to be so.

*Bologna, 4 Feb. 1826*

Not only can we not (So far are we from being able to, etc.) know or conjecture sufficiently about everything that human nature universally, aided by favorable circumstances, is capable of, but even for one individual, past, present, or future, we cannot know exactly nor conjecture fully about the range or scale his faculties might have had or might have in appropriate circumstances.

*Bologna, 21 Feb. 1826*

Go into a garden of plants, grass, flowers. No matter how lovely it seems. Even in the mildest season of the year. You will not be able to look anywhere and not find suffering. That whole family of vegetation is in a state of *souffrance*, each in its own way to some degree. Here a rose is attacked by the sun, which has given it life; it withers, languishes, wilts. There a lily is sucked cruelly by a bee, in its most sensitive, most life-giving parts. Sweet honey is not produced by industrious, patient, good, virtuous bees without unspeakable torment for those most delicate fibers, without the pitiless massacre of flowerets. That tree is infested by an ant colony, that other one by caterpillars, flies, snails, mosquitoes; this one is injured in its bark and afflicted by the air or by the sun penetrating the wound; that other one has a damaged trunk, or roots; that other has many dry leaves; that other one has its flowers gnawed at, nibbled; that other one has its fruits pierced, eaten away. That plant is too warm, this one too cold; too much light, too much shade; too wet, too dry. One cannot grow or spread easily because there are obstacles and obstructions; another finds nowhere to lean, or has trouble and struggles to reach any support. In the whole garden you will not find a single plant in a state

of perfect health. Here a branch is broken by the wind or by its own weight; there a gentle breeze is tearing a flower apart, and carries away a piece, a filament, a leaf, a living part of this or that plant, which has broken or been torn off. Meanwhile you torture the grass by stepping on it; you grind it down, crush it, squeeze out its blood, break it, kill it. A sensitive and gentle young maiden goes sweetly cutting and breaking off stems. A gardener expertly chops down trunks, breaking off sensitive limbs, with his nails, with his tools. (Bologna, 19 April 1826.) Certainly these plants live on; some because their infirmities are not fatal, others because even with fatal diseases, plants, and animals as well, can manage to live on a little while. The spectacle of such abundance of life when you first go into this garden lifts your spirits, and that is why you think it is a joyful place. But in truth this life is wretched and unhappy, every garden is like a vast hospital (a place much more deplorable than a cemetery), and if these beings feel, or rather, were to feel, surely not being would be better for them than being.

*Bologna, 22 April 1826*

It is evident and well known that the idea and the word *spirit* when all is said and done cannot be otherwise defined than as *substance which is not matter*, since it has no positive qualities we can know, or put a name to, or even imagine. Now matter as word and idea, an idea and word likewise abstract, that is expressing collectively an infinite number of objects really quite different from one another (and we in fact do not know whether matter is homogeneous, and therefore one identical substance, or else has different elements, and therefore as many substances, quite different in nature and essence, in the way in which it is distinct in a variety of forms), matter, I repeat, as both word and idea embraces everything which falls and can fall under our senses, everything we know, and are able to know and to conceive of; and this idea and word can only really be defined in this way, or at least this definition is the most apt, rather than the other deduced from the enumeration of some of its common

qualities, like divisibility, width, length, depth, and suchlike. For that reason the definition of spirit as *a substance which is not matter* is exactly the same as defining it as *a substance which is not one of those we know or are able to know or to conceive of*, and that is all we actually say and think every time we say *spirit*, or we think about the idea, which cannot, as I have said, be defined otherwise. Nevertheless this spirit, which is no other than the one we have been discussing, has for many centuries been thought to contain in itself all reality of things; and matter, that is all we know and conceive of, and all we are able to know and to conceive of, has been thought to be only appearance, dream, emptiness compared with spirit. It is impossible not to deplore the poverty of the human intellect if we consider such delirium. But when we think that this delirium is completely back with us today; that everywhere in the 19th century there is a rebirth and a radical revival of spiritualism, perhaps even more spiritual, so to speak, than before; that the most enlightened philosophers of the most enlightened modern nation, congratulate themselves on recognizing as the characteristic of this century, the fact that it is "éminemment religieux" ["eminently religious"], that is spiritualistic; what else can a wise man do, but utterly despair of the *enlightenment* of human minds, and cry out: "O Truth, you have vanished from the earth for ever, just when men had started to search you out." For it is clear that this and innumerable other lunacies, of which it now seems impossible and hopeless to cure human intellects, are actually the product, not of ignorance, but of learning. The fanciful idea of the spirit never enters the head of a child or a pure savage. The child or savage is not spiritualistic because he is completely ignorant. And children, and pure savages, and anyone completely ignorant are consequently a thousand times more wise than the most learned men of this enlightened century, as the ancients were a hundred times more wise at least, because they were more ignorant than the moderns. And they were more wise the more ancient they were, because they were that much more ignorant.

*Bologna, 26 Sept. 1826*

Reading the curious letter by Verus to Fronto (AD VERUM IMPERATOREM, letter 3, Roman ed.) in which he asks him to write the history of Verus's own exploits in the Parthian war, it seems to me just like reading a letter by some modern writer to a journalist about one of his books. The same vanity, exaggeration, disregard for the truth, etc. And in fact that letter (see also Cicero's letter to Lucceius) shows us how little we should rely on histories, even ones written at the time. But what a difference between ancients and moderns even here! Nowadays they recommend (1) their miserable little books, (2) to a journalist, (3) for an article. The ancients recommended (1) their military or civic achievements, (2) to famous men, (3) for a history, etc. etc. Verus's letter has *no* variation in the Milan edition and would be worth quoting, in translation.

*Florence, 21 June,  
anniversary of my first arrival in Florence, 1828*

As society becomes more perfect, with the progress of civilization, the masses gain, but individuality is lost. It loses strength, value, perfection, and therefore happiness, and this is the case with the moderns compared to the ancients. This is the view of all modern people of true and genuine wisdom, even the keenest defenders of civilization. Therefore the perfection of man is like that of the Capuchins: the road of penitence.

5 Sept. 1828

You laugh openly and loudly about something, even entirely innocently, with one or two people in a café, in a conversation, in a street: everybody who hears or sees you laughing like this will turn and look at you with respect; if they were talking, they will stop, they will seem humbled; they will never dare to laugh at you; if they had previously looked at you boldly or condescendingly, they will lose their boldness and condescension toward you. In the end, simply *laughing out loud* gives you a definite superiority over all those near and around you, without exception. The power of laughter is terrible and *aw-*

*ful*: anyone who has the courage to laugh is master over others, in the same way as anyone who has the courage to die.

23 Sept. 1828

The exclusion of the foreigner and the subject from the rights (however natural and primordial) of the citizen and the dominant nation, an exclusion to be found in all ancient legislation, in all legislation pertaining to a middling civilization, one based implicitly upon a view of the natural inferiority of other races of men to the dominant or citizen race and explicitly based upon this principle, was first codified in scientific and philosophical theory and doctrine, so far as is known (like so much other opinion and knowledge of the time) by Aristotle in his *POLITICS* (a work often cited by Niebuhr in his *ROMAN HISTORY* as being genuinely by Aristotle). This exclusion is very obvious in all medieval legislation, in which the favor of the law in defending property and people, and every other right, was almost exclusively on the side of the nobility alone. In France a noble who killed a nonnoble faced no other penalty than to throw five sous on the grave of the victim: such was the law. (*Courier*.) The same with all other rights. And it is well known that modern legislations are still not properly purged of their original vice of distinguishing between two races of men—noble and nonnoble, etc. Nobles, as observed by jurists and historians, are mostly and almost totally, in those semibarbarous legislations, synonymous with people who are free, who are native-born, with *citizens*, with *burghers* in Germany (Niebuhr, *ROMAN HISTORY*, p. 283), nationals, belonging to the dominant nation, and for whom the laws are made; and the nonnoble are no more, in origin, than foreigners, subjects, servants, members of the defeated and conquered nation. All of the much-criticized perversity of medieval and modern legislation relating to *nobility* (synonymous with native birth, nationality) derive from that principle of distinguishing between citizen and foreigner in relation to human rights, which we have often reflected upon in the most ancient peoples. This also includes the Turkish legislation

in relation to the rajas, that is, to slaves, that is, to Greeks, defeated and conquered, people considered as being different from the Turks.

*4 Dec. 1828*

My philosophy not only does not lead to misanthropy, as might seem to anyone who looks at it superficially, and as many accuse it of doing, but by its nature it excludes misanthropy, by its nature it aims to cure, to extinguish that ill humor, that hatred (not systematic but nevertheless real hatred) which very many people who are not philosophers, and would not wish to be called or thought of as misanthropes, feel in their hearts nonetheless toward their fellow humans, either habitually, or in particular circumstances, by reason of the ill which, rightly or wrongly, like everyone else, they receive from other people. My philosophy makes nature guilty of everything, and by exonerating humanity altogether, it redirects the hatred, or at least the complaint, to a higher principle, the true origin of the ills of living beings, etc. etc.

*Recanati, 2 January 1829*

It can be doubted whether any real progress is being made in relation not only to reason, but also to knowledge, learning, erudition, human understanding. The ancient is forgotten and abandoned in favor of the modern. Here I do not mean archaeology but civil and political history, literary history, the knowledge of great men, the bibliology, the literature, the discoveries, the very sciences of the ancients. We are taught, we know about, what the moderns know; the knowledge of the ancients (which was perhaps just as great) is ignored and unknown. Nor do I mean only the Greeks and Romans, but our own people from earlier centuries, not excluding the 18th century either. Look at the most learned and erudite moderns. Except for a few monsters of knowledge (such as the odd German) who are knowledgeable about old and new alike, the immense encyclopedic knowledge of the others covers, so to speak, only the present. What they know of the

past is so superficial as to be useless. Instead of increasing our knowledge, all we do is replace one knowledge with another, even in one single subject (without, however, one area of study then prevailing in one period at the expense of the others). And this is something entirely natural. Time is short, human knowledge is growing but the span of life is not, and this does not allow *more than a certain amount* of knowledge. I do not know, upon closer consideration, how much even the material sciences are progressing. With hardly sufficient time to learn about the innumerable observations made by contemporaries, how much profit can be gained from those of the past? The materials do not increase, they change. And how many things are discovered every day which our forebears had already discovered! Only, no one gave them any further thought. I repeat that I am talking not only about the ancients, but also about people from recent times. One glance at the biographical Dictionaries, the writings, observations, discoveries, practices of men who have been forgotten or are hardly known, and yet who lived only a few years or decades ago, will support and confirm these considerations. People are learning every day, but the human race forgets, and I know not whether to the same extent.

13 May 1829



*The world is increasingly unthinkable – a world of planetary disasters, emerging pandemics, tectonic shifts, strange weather, oil-drenched seascapes, and the furtive, always-looming threat of extinction. In spite of our daily concerns, wants, and desires, it is increasingly difficult to comprehend the world in which we live and of which we are a part. To confront this idea is to confront an absolute limit to our ability to adequately understand the world at all...*

Eugene Thacker,  
*In the Dust of This Planet*

*For those who've only heard of nihilism, perhaps merely walked to the edge of that abyss and peered across its yawning, desolate vastness, it must surely appear as an ending; a terminal thought beyond which no thoughts are possible. Wading off from that lightless grotto, however, one finds merely another beginning. Even as the last glint of torchlight is lost behind the horizon, our swimmer begins to trade now useless knowledge of running and seeing for Other locomotions and more exotic sensitivities. In the journal BEZNA, meaning something less like "darkness" and more like "The Darkness," Romanian artists combat the commodification of hope and happiness by homesteading negativity and cannibalizing their misery while fleshing out the politics of sadness. What follows in the two parts of "Dead Thinking" is something like a tutorial in being lived by one's corpse, a perhaps necessary skill for those whose suicide by the shore was no reason to stop living.*

# Dead Thinking: Part 1

Alina Popa

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*I write for one who, entering into my book, would  
fall into it as into a hole,  
who would never again get out.*

Georges Bataille

## I: The Death Game of Thinking

*The scaffolding of a nightmare requires a nervous  
expenditure more exhausting than the best articu-  
lated theoretical construction.*

Emil Cioran

*I'm from the other side of the mirror, I come from  
you.*

Dust Devil

*I will bury myself in my own imagination and let  
myself rot, eaten by all the thoughts that I once ate.  
Until only an almost-nothing remains, an infra-  
thing that whispers between words and speaks to  
You!*

Laura di Cristallo

## The Count of Dead Thoughts

A lonely thought is wandering aimlessly through the cemetery of concepts appalled at the sight of its own dark neuro-crypt. Deeply enfolded by the dust of its very logic another thought lost sight forever. A third thought passionately inhaled the smoke-aura of cremated reason. A next thought, deducted from the previous, chokes with the rising spiral of the ashes of its cause. Air that strikes, air that punches you in the face, thoughtlessly, absentmindedly. A thought, too anaemic to be included in any intelligent spectrum, oscil-

lates between infinitesimally close shades of morbid pallor. A mad recursive thought-rhythm: terrible stim of your pupil. The drone of being makes ripples of nothingness. A monotonic breath inhales back its every exhalation-sigh in an exquisite logic of near-suffocation. A last thought warps to swallow its own end before it begins.

### **The Thought-Sarkophagos**

Both thought and I are caged together in a crypt-ical illusion, carrying around each other's hallucination. The more I speed it up, the less I am myself, I become a mere host for the alien worm that is coiled in my brain and is writing with my hand. To slow it down is to start smelling the dampness of its supercognitive crypt. I cannot will to think. And I cannot will to not think. Ligotti's salutary completion of Descartes's dictum ("I think therefore I am and one day I will die") makes it clear that to begin to think is to begin to think horror. Once consciousness appeared something dark and abysmal found its way worming inside the bland thoughts of humankind. Cognition: a horror theme park of your darkest nightmares. Each of us—paradoxes compelled to horror-think. "The footsteps that I hear are my own" (DD). The ungluing of myself from me, the disentanglement of "I" from thinking. "It" thinks. Nietzsche's breaking of the correlation between the subject "I" and the will to think ("a thought comes when "it" wishes, and not when "I" wish; so that it is a perversion of the facts of the case to say that the subject "I" is the condition of the predicate to "think") could be radicalized into: a thought that comes when I wish "it" less. "I" is not the condition of thinking, but thinking happens in spite of and against "I": "Whence did I get the notion of 'thinking'? Why do I believe in cause and effect? What gives me the right to speak of an 'ego', and even of an 'ego' as cause, and finally of an 'ego' as cause of thought?" (FN). I am only able to think against thought, against the "againstness" of thought. Thinking with thought is impossible. Or too possible. When thought is free, "I" will "be not" anymore: "(S)ince true thought thinks itself, that type of thought attains its object in the act of thinking itself... True thought is

authorless"(CL). I am most free when thinking "is not", when I would have killed yet another thought, first and foremost the thought of "I". "In losing myself I find myself dangerous"(CL).

I fear that one day I will find myself rotting, eaten up by my wormed, convoluted thoughts. Find what has already evaporated in a necrosis that happened before the time of "I", find that there was nothing to find in the first place.

### **The Slime-Thought**

"Thought is lagging behind itself"(BM via BL). It drags its impossible weight of being what it is pregnant with what it "is not". Despite its constitutive sluggishness thought deceives its own retarded nature by hallucinating a "now" for itself. As a snail, it exudes its own shell-home in the form of a protective, illusory now by erasing its tortuous line of lag. It constructs its own umbilical cord back to a navel that never existed. It already happened outside itself: "Thought hallucinates that it coincides with itself"(BM). It eats its half-second lag to stand right in time. "One of the things that happens in the lapsing is a fiction. Libet determined that thought covers up its lag: the awareness is 'backdated' so that each thought experiences itself to have been at the precise time the stimulus was applied"(BM). The feedback loop between thought and affect, between consciousness and body creates a time-smudge of infinite causes that are already infested by their effects. The "now" does not coincide with itself. There are myriads of infra-nows in and for themselves. The time of bodymind is scattered. The present of consciousness is a sluggish now, while NOW is the moment of intensity when all scattered instants collapse into each other.

The now of consciousness is interrupted. "(W)e must ask if 'nothingness', unthinkable as a limit or negation of being, is not possible as interval and interruption; we must ask whether consciousness, with its aptitude for sleep, for suspension, for epoché, is not the locus of this nothingness-interval"(EL). Slumber is not the retreat of consciousness, it is immanent in thought. Consciousness is being constituted by its retreats, its somnolence and reservations. Snail-ization.

Senilization. All within. Thought escapes itself. "The present... is behind the present. It catches up with itself but with a lag behind itself, or effects a retreat, a rebound, in the simplicity of its stroke"(EL). The present is a snail that returns upon itself in a movement-reflection of its spiraled shell.

Thinking is never 'now' and ever too late. To accelerate it is to discover the swift thought-slime that your tongue has just become. I left my humanity behind and I am walking the slime's way. I am licking the silvery track that I myself secreted in advance. The amorphous flesh of thinking screams its inhumanity, our inhumanity. "(T)he inhuman is our better part, is the thing, the thing part of people"(CL). We are as impossible as thinking, on the brink of definitions, so madly finite that we are born of extinction. Left with a thought as mere reflection of our own look in the eyes of impossibility. The mirror-hall of impossibility and thinking is the most honest schizo-tactics, the monstrous sight of ourselves in our purely reflexive mode.

In writing I am enacting the thought-game of a toy that forgot its own rules for play. An I-toy that thinks by hanging to the nothingness of the game it wants to become: "(A game) is a reality that leaves no traces; the nothingness that preceded it is equal to that which follows it. Its events do not have real time. A game has no history"(EL). Toys are played by the game. Slime-toys are dreams of this formless game. Dream of Mattel-intelligence, green ooze playing with me, throwing me back into the dustbin to which both 'I' and slime-toy belong.

### **The Thought-Chase**

The only possible cognitive acceleration: thinking not as running thoughts but as running away from thoughts. Chased by your impossible cognition, 'now' is too full—'they' are coming from all the directions. If I let only one thought catch me, it is enough to unfold the catastrophe.

A thought's horror of itself. A self-reflexive drama.

Entrapped in cognitive monomania: a melodrama of one.

The irreparable focus of thought on its own misery discharges a predator-reflex: thought ingurgitates itself until annihilation. It is then that I live the most, it is only then that I most intensely 'am not'. "Horror is the event of being which returns in the heart of this negation, as though nothing had happened"(EL). An autophagic thought latched onto its already decaying matter, sucking us through, circumventing being by consuming it from without. This silent consumption, the return of thought to its own immanent negation is the event of never having happened. Thought happened to me, but now it is over, as if it has just begun.

Thoughts afraid of other thoughts horrendously unfold, trying to break loose from the solid horror of their too logical chain. Effect fears cause but lurks backwards upon it in a curled act of forced feeding: recursive causality. A sewing backwards with an ever changing thread, a confusion of pulling and being pulled. Thoughts chasing each other. Gaping insuperable faults between one another, drilling a void inside of themselves. Thoughts plunging into their own futile core, infinitely swooning, forever resurrecting from and into their own ashes. There is no escape from falling into your inner void: "My interior emptiness will engulf me, I will be swallowed by my own void. To collapse into yourself, into your own nothingness"(EMC).

"There is no work that does not return against its author: the poem crushes the poet, the system the philosopher..."(EMC via NL). Driven by the dread of itself a thought produces another thought which destroys its progenitor. Causes destroyed by their effects. Causes reborn through their own effects. Present giving birth to past anew. Intensity of present that alters the extension of time. Not only is future the "maximization of absence"(TG) but it is the intensification of an absence already too much here. Time is a twisted umbilical cord.

### **The Low, Injurious Level of Thoughts**

Now rest. Imagine a flat bottom of bottoms filled with lonely thoughts: "Don't let one thought teach another thought. All

thoughts, which wrongly give you a sense of identity, are on the same low, injurious, level" (VH via NM). My thoughts will be strange to other thoughts and strange to themselves. In the flat ontology of thinking, the cemetery of sufficient reason is a post-causal heaven. Causes have existed but they ceased to matter. 'Hyperchaos' of total cognitive stasis.

To dissect life is to vivisect death. The chopped samples of death-life are chrono-logically alien to each other. My chronopathic body-parts make up my "unhuman phenomenology" (DT) and hide a reason unthinkable to itself: "Even the materials of my body and the lower levels of my brain have a very different sense of time from my cerebrum" (JGB). My nails think my arm, my arms think my mouth, my mouth thinks my heart, my heart thinks my brain. All impossible thinkers abiding different times more than different spaces. In a complete serenity of being when all these recursive thoughts of a temporally dismembered body reach a perfect balance (levitation, ever lighter stages of the body, astronaut-bodies) the gravity of thinking differs from the earthly constant ( $g=9.81$ ). Thinking itself becomes a round heap of air, a mass of chaotic disintegrated accelerations. If thinking has been traditionally linked to heaviness, the pathology of thought's own gravity reaches the limit of thought itself—a peaceful limit, not a catastrophic one. A phenomenology of roundness, that feeling of completion along with the absentmindedness it requires (or the roundness of affect in its plenitude of perceiving self-perception) corresponds to a non-gravitational thought floating like astronauts in outer space. The ungrounding of thinking equals a disentanglement of thought from the attraction force of the earth and its re-emergence into new twisted gravities. In living the not-thought (or the naught-thought) one loses perspective, not in the sense of regress but in the sense of disintegrating into an infinity of perspectives that do not touch each other, almost exploding in a full roundness of myriad 'points' of view. The infra-points that pierce all solid de-voiding it of resistance to become a void of fully accomplished thought-feelings, zero-thoughts. "All points

of view are wrong because each has an opposite that limits it. (Beyond coincidentia oppositorum) lies the sphere or curvature on which opposition occurs. To think such that thought, any perspective, becomes a point of transposition into oppositeless and perspectiveless ( )hole or zero-all of the sphere"(NM).

Transform words in 'shovels without a master' that dig large crevasses in between words, that blow prepositions right in their core. Warp the verbs, offend the substantives. Suffixes, prefixes, prepositions are twitching machines that madly unground every Grund for thinking. Once a logical chain, tired of inference, settles itself in too heavy a heap, the whole steel edifice collapses under the terrible weight of its holes, of its infiltrations and differential density. The heap of logical principles is absolutely flat. Pathos is no less logical than a Turing machine. Nothing is more logical than anything else.

## II: Pinnacle of Negativity

*La première de ces démonomanes a déjà eu deux accès de lypémanie. Le démon est dans son corps, qui la torture de mille manières; elle ne mourra jamais.*

*La deuxième n'a plus de corps; le diable a emporté son corps; elle est une vision; elle vivra des milliers d'années, elle a le malin esprit dans l'utérus sous la forme d'un serpent, quoiqu'elle n'ait pas les organes de la génération faits comme les femmes.*

*La troisième n'a pas non plus de corps, le malin esprit l'a emporté n'en laissant que le simulacre qui restera éternellement sur la terre. Elle n'a point de sang, elle est insensible (analgésie).*

*La quatrième n'est pas allée à la selle depuis vingt ans, son corps est un sac fait de la peau du diable plein de crapauds, de serpents, etc.*

*La cinquième a le cœur déplacé, elle ne mourra jamais.*

*L'autre a un vide à la région épigastrique; elle est damnée, elle n'a plus d'àme. Plus tard la pensée lui*

*vint qu'elle était immortelle.*

Jules Cotard,  
ÉTUDES SUR LES MALADIES  
CÉRÉBRALES ET MENTALES

*[The first of the demonomaniacs has already had three crises of lypomania. The demon is inside her body, it tortures her in innumerable ways; she will never die.*

*The second has no body anymore; the devil carried away her body; she is a vision; she will live thousands of years, she has the malignant spirit inside her uterus in the shape of a snake, although she does not have reproduction organs as women do.*

*The third has no body anymore, the malignant spirit carried her away leaving behind just a simulacrum that will remain on earth eternally. She has no blood, she is insensate (analgesia).*

*The fourth has not been defecating for twenty years, her body is a bag made from the skin of the devil, full of toads and serpents, etc.*

*The fifth had her heart dislocated, she will never die. Another one has a vacuum in the epigastric region; she is doomed, she has no soul anymore. Later the thought came to her that she was immortal.]*

Jules Cotard,  
[A Study of Neurological  
and Mental DISORDERS]

- Footnote: "Cotard's count of negativity delusion is a terrifyingly real poetry, a sestet of disintegration, of suspension, of being no-one and for no reason, of bodies without bodies, of animal organs and feral sterility of being neither dead nor alive."
- I am just a footnote to the empty text that is my (non)existence. Footnotes to no-one, recursive junk. The seventh is I. Self-induced Cotard syndrome: the only possible way to think. To think without thought.

- You sound like a bot.
- And you are just trolling yourself.
- Are we speaking?
- No, something else is speaking us. We are nothing.
- Nothing is strong. Sometimes it is unbearable, like immortality ("ils gémissent de leur immortalité et supplient qu'on les en délivre" [They wail their immortality and beseech us to deliver them]). Though it is the only thing we can take and only in it we find deliverance, in the midst of this world, the next.
- Distrust in any metaphysical ground coupled with the sole trust that one is an emptied self clung to this horror-world like a rag hanging from a nail. So much existence has receded from me that my 'thrownness' into this impossible 'to be' disappeared faster than the world. One cannot die because one is not truly alive ("elle ne mourra jamais, elle n'est ni morte ni vivante" [she will never die, she is neither dead nor alive]), yet a world insists to cling to my inexistence. A world hangs from my nothingness. This wind-world keeps blowing, stirring the desert of myself, I, living "relic from the future"(FF). To disclose myself I have emptied myself and my thinking is the pinnacle of my inexistence.
- You seem convincing but these are certainly not your thoughts. It is that useless hive-mind.
- Could you for a while trust your state of mind?
- I am trusting neither states of mind nor statements of the mind.
- Then you are sick.
- "Normalcy itself is a mode, a subspecies of psychosis"(SZ/ FWJS). I am inhabiting my limbo-hell of perceiving self-perception as self-destruction. Existence as the sole fact that I am in the sense of my ur-quality as 'existent', whilst all other facts of being have vanished like a carpet pulled from under my feet. A hell-limbo as both indefinite and horror region, the limb, the line. A fuzzy border that cuts: what is—cut—what is not. I am dwelling in this enormous cut-wound, bigger than myself. I—a limb,

a border, a line. Space begins with borders, I begins with the 1 of individuation. For Kant the space is created by the symmetry of the body, by the stretching of the limbs to opposite sides. I, 1 erect as the verticality of a trunk. Not-I, no-1, the forest has flown away. The sylvan world left hanging by a sole thought-stump. Impossible walk on the severed limbs of inference, limping-thinking.

- These were my words, weren't they?
- They are neither your words nor someone else's. It is just by chance that they happened to you as much as they are happening to me. They linger somewhere in the cloud of the unuttered. Not only am I not the predicate of thinking but thinking is in a relationship of negativity with the I, both to use it as a hypothesis and to destroy its existence altogether. Self as junk or as hypothesis, however you like it. Not "I think therefore I am" but "It thinks because I am not." Humans are led to the thought that thinking itself is inhuman. They are also led to thinking that they themselves are inhuman. It shows that thinking is at place in humans while utterly displaced, so that when humans think thinking they are thinking horror through being nothing and when thinking thinks humans it is thinking nothing through being horror.
- Footnote to footnote: "Individuation is felt like a torture. Since immortality is precisely the suspension between being alive and being dead, an empty feeling of individuation (their mind putrefied, their heart exploded—'*leur cœur a éclaté*', their brain like a 'flat nut'—'*sa tête est comme une noisette creuse*', bloodless, soul-less, no organs in no bodies). The apogee of distrust in any reality objectively drawn translates the certainty of the negativity of all."
- "C'est la folie d'opposition." [It's the madness of opposition.]
- "Le délire d'enormité." [Enormity delirium.]
- Nothingness-monomania is the melodrama of the enormity of thought.
- Nothingness delirium: hole bigger than the whole.

- "I only use reason as an anesthetic" (CL).
- "*Généralement les aliénés sont négateurs; les démonstrations les plus claires, les affirmations les mieux autorisées, les témoignages les plus affectueux les laissent incrédules ou ironiques. La réalité leur est devenue étrangère ou hostile.*" [Generally, the alienated are negators; the clearest demonstrations, the most reliable affirmations, the most affectionate gestures leave them incredulous and ironic. Reality has become strange and hostile to them.]
- Am I suffering from I or from you?
- Neither of these. 'It' is suffering from every 'I' that thinks in 'I's and 'You's. People are terminally diagnosed with pronoun delusion.
- "Il semble au malade que le monde réel s'est complètement évanoui, a disparu ou est mort et qu'il ne reste plus qu'un monde imaginaire au milieu duquel il est tourmenté de se trouver." [It seems to the patient that the real world has completely vanished, has disappeared, or is dead, and that there remains only an imaginary world in the middle of which he is tormented to find himself]
- Are we for real?
- No, only real is for real.
- "*Des malades disent qu'ils ne mourront pas, parce que leur corps n'est pas dans les conditions ordinaires d'organisation, que s'ils avaient pu mourir, ils seraient morts depuis longtemps; ils sont dans un état qui n'est ni la vie, ni la mort; ils sont morts vivants.*" [The patients say that they don't die because their body is not under normal conditions of organization, that if they could have died, they would have been dead for a long time now; they are in a state that is neither life nor death; they are living dead]
- Omnipotence of thought to the power of nihilism.
- The torment of not being able to be done with yourself, because you are suspended like Ligotti's puppet, hanging from a malevolent string, swinging in the rhythm

of an ominous creak over the bottom of a reluctant doomed world. The end of correlationism waiting for time to happen at once, for the inconstancy of inconstancy, for the awaited contingency to set ablaze the last string of salvation. To untether intelligibility from sensibility means both a severing and an appalling reconciliation: the sole intelligibility is that of horror, of oneself as an etheric yet too-consistent reflection of the void, as if one irreversibly swallowed an analgesic against what in a deep past was the sensibility of being-in-the-world.

- "Leur demande-t-on leur nom? ils n'ont pas de nom; leur âge? ils n'ont pas d'âge; où ils sont nés? ils ne sont pas nés; qui étaient leur père et leur mère? ils n'ont ni père, ni mère, ni femme, ni enfants; s'ils ont mal à la tête, mal à l'estomac, mal en quelque point de leur corps? ils n'ont pas de tête, pas d'estomac, quelques-uns même n'ont point de corps...Chez quelques-uns la négation est universelle, rien n'existe plus, eux-mêmes ne sont plus rien." [One asks their name? they have no name; their age? they have no age; where they were born? they were not born; who were their father and mother? they have neither father, nor mother, nor wife, nor children; if they have headaches, if their stomach hurts, if some part of their body hurts? they have no head, no stomach, some of them even have no body...For some of them negation is universal, nothing exists anymore, they themselves are nothing]
- How long will the environment resist the attack of 'I'? "Endurance of an organism is a form of patience of the environment"(IS). Anonymity that resists the attack of names. The amorphous that holds against the tyranny of form. The uncut self versus the escalation of the one. The open-source that opposes the concreteness of a name.
- A detection that de-tects by moving away. Tailing the unknown to find more un than known. Being the detective of one's own life is to place oneself in the center of absolute futility, to make ennui a life-long obsession. To

be bored of oneself to the point that you are bored of your boredom.

- *Comment vous portez-vous, madame?*
- *La personne de moi-même n'est pas une dame, appelez-moi mademoiselle, s'il vous plaît.*
- *Je ne sais pas votre nom, veuillez me le dire?*
- *La personne de moi-même n'a pas de nom: elle souhaite que vous n'écriviez pas.*
- *Je voudrais pourtant bien savoir comment on vous appelle, ou plutôt comment on vous appelait autrefois.*
- *Je comprends ce que vous voulez dire. C'était Catherine X..., il ne faut plus parler de ce qui avait lieu. La personne de moi-même a perdu son nom, elle l'a donné en entrant à la Salpêtrière.*
- *Quel âge avez-vous?*
- *La personne de moi-même n'a pas d'âge.*

Jules Cotard,  
ÉTUDES SUR LES MALADIES  
CÉRÉBRALES ET MENTALES

- [—How are you madam?
- The no-one of myself is not a madam, call me miss, please.
- I don't know your name, could you tell it to me?
- The no-one of myself has no name: she wishes you didn't write.
- I would nevertheless like to know what your name is, or rather what your name was in the past.
- I understand what you mean. It was Catherine X..., we shouldn't talk about what has taken place. The no-one of myself has lost her name, she gave it away by entering Salpêtrière.
- How old are you?
- The no-one of myself has no age.]

Jules Cotard,  
[A STUDY OF NEUROLOGICAL  
AND MENTAL DISORDERS]

### III: The Fossil of Unreason

*Madness, of course—but had I not now stumbled into a nighted world as mad as I?*

H.P. Lovecraft

*You love-craftian hero! You have resurrected the fossil of myself, the one that I cannot experience but that is speaking through me, seeping into my lack of words! The monster is here and I cannot stop it, I don't want it ever to shut up.*

L'aura di Cristallo

Whatever happens in this life there will be the fault of this cataclysmic 'now' screaming to me, deafening me with the echo of a deformity that I always was. In thinking I am walking "the treadmill of myself" to discover that immobilized 'Cyclone' (JT via GB) buried deep inside, slumberous soul-storm from outer space.

In thinking I am chanting my own obituary.

A dark mass of stellar junk is resonating in me: "indeed the whole primal age and past of all sentient being continues in me to invent, to love, to hate, to infer. I suddenly woke up in the midst of this dream, but only to the consciousness that I am dreaming and that I must go on dreaming lest I perish" (FN via GB). The benighted universe is dreaming me, that 'me' that is dreaming a consciousness. 'I' is a recursive dream. Blindly my thoughts follow the irreparable veins of a nestedness that screams the fossilized nothingness that my consciousness is. An ancestral and unknown force pulls the chords of a voice that I never had. A howler-voice of long accumulated xeno-strata. I am the hyperdiligent stenographer typing the echo of a disheveled, anonymous thinking that hits the cave-walls of myself. I ride on asymptotes, waiting to collapse under the terrible weight of the darkness of my thoughts. I am as remote from myself as from the last dying star. An infinite black wildness moans without a sound in my dwindling 'I', my gravitational flesh is unfurling a malefic time onto a perfect now of absolute self-oblivion. My absentmindedness uncovers a profusion of

mineral thoughts that hang like stalactites from the ceiling of my mind. One syncopated drop of this alien matter can instantly open a large crevasse in myself where I will meticulously stay hidden.

The ungrounding (Ungrund—unreason) of thinking itself, a heedless intuition of the hellish negation buried in matter itself, reveals thought as being least defined by its stable, identifiable, and specific qualities. The unthinkable, the unreason of reason is embedded in the deep archeology of thought itself. We are media through which events of thinking happen, unconscious vessels of unhuman intensities. The algorithmic “incomputable”(LP via GC), as well as Chaitin’s Omega are long embedded in our own xenothoughts. “(I)n the midst of the world as such resides the ‘possibility’ of that which is wholly other to the world”(QM). We are actively and intensely possessed by an edgeless time outside us, manifest in us. “Time happens to us”(NL).

And I am saddling up the cusps of NOW.

Now is the timescale collapsed into the space of a body that is both a place and its dislocation. Nothing coincides with itself. As much as we embody our own extinction, we also conceal the arche-fossil within ourselves. “Whatever secret the Earth conceals is also concealed within ourselves”(DT). The materiality of our bodies witnesses itself through us as a “dark background of existence”(EL). “I am obscure even to myself”(CL). The self, “the cage of interiority”(TM) is the place where exteriority is latent. If “(t)ransparency simply means that we are unaware of the medium through which information reaches us”(TM), then transparency is another name for darkness. The ‘phenomenal self model’ is far from being a safety tunnel for our ego. In this hermetic dark passage where the first obscurity becomes the self, the first to be effaced is the very foundation of our existence. Groping in the darkness of ourselves, we become nothing more than a dark mirror of an indifferent world, reflecting its own reflection. “The world looks at itself in me”(CL).

Horrified by the source of cognition, I still drink at the fountainhead of my monstrous thoughts.

A dark river is flowing through my being leaving me all silt, a turbid sediment of impossibility. I see in me a fossilized future and a resurrected past because I am nothing. I heedlessly “go on signifying”(DA via GA), I sculpt words in flows that burst from a valve unknown, a valve that is pumping in the rhythm of my heart. As Robinet, “I am persuaded that fossils are alive”. “For every form retains life, and a fossil is not merely a being that once lived, but one that is still alive, asleep in its form”(GB). Thought retains in itself the fossilized specters of geological strata which can only be accessed by absentmindedness. Behind my most limpid inference lies a “black knowledge which festered in the chasms of my subconscious”(HPL). A thought that feels itself thinking is writing the partiture of its own silence. Thought is alive but its coffin is buried within it. A live thought drags its own coffin along, a dead thought is pulled by its very casket. If we are carriers of a clandestine mineralogy manifest in its slumber, then the most alive of all fossils is the fossil of reason’s inexistence.

To produce a dead thinking is to discover that death of thought is ingrained in the matter of thinking itself. Inexistence hides in a deep strata of existence lurking upon us from a future which will be past again. “Nothing human makes it out of the near-future”(NL). And I am still licking the wounds of my thoughts.

The Romanian orthodox burial song of Christ ‘*Prohodul Domnului*’ places the divine funeral at the epicenter of a large-scale affective-geological event:

*Ziditorule,*

*Primindu-Te în sân pământul*

*S-a clătit de frica Ta, Preaputernice,*

*Si pe morți cutremurul i-a deșteptat*”

[Letting Thou inside its womb

The Earth trembled with fear

And the earthquake awakened the dead].

This human trembling, the amplification of its grief is translated back to a geotremor, earth and body are terminally linked, their non-coincidence overspills into one another. Body and earth: communicating vessels of alien-

ation. The collective human grief, a tectonic mourning is so moving that it makes the planet tremble and scares the dead out of their tombs. In horror one scares the death of thinking out of its fossilized shell. The burial story of trembling and earthquake restores death at the epicenter of thinking. Being scared to death resurrects the negativity fossilized in the matter of thought. The fiction is real and happens in horror, in the most banal and unspectacular horror that “restores us to the negativity of existence as if nothing has happened”(EL). The trembling-earthquake resurrection can be amplified as following: only by coming back from the dead is one really intelligent (the Romanian verb ‘a deștepta’—to awaken—means both to become smart/intelligent and to raise from the dead). The paradox of thinking: to grasp the wholeness of thought is to annihilate it. Intelligence embeds the intelligibility of its own inexistence and only by disappearing it can become fully intelligent. Genuine bootstrapping requires to un-be.

The orthodox funerary song Prohodulul Domnului, wherein collective human grief turns geological, frightening the dead out of their tombs performs exactly the opposite thought-movement at the core of Junji Ito’s manga story “The Mystery of Amigara Fault.” Here, a great earthquake, a tectonic stuttering of the soil, produces cracks in the exact shape of every human living on Earth. People are mysteriously attracted to these unforgiving holes and enter absent-mindedly their assigned rock-tomb, finally disappearing inside the fault. The earthquake no longer awakens the dead from their tombs but opens up human shaped crypt-caves that absorb back to themselves the entire humanity. It is the call of extinction, the reality of which is fossilized into human materiality itself and is screaming our memory of dust.

#### **IV: The Shape of Inexistence**

*The only thing that interests me is whatever cannot be thought—whatever can be thought is too little for me*  
[ANGELA PRALINI]

Clarice Lispector

Being (objectivity) is always merely an expression of a limitation of the intuiting or producing activity. There is a cube in this portion of space, means nothing else but that in this part of space my intuition can be active only in the form of a cube. The ground of all reality in cognition is thus the ground of limitation independent of intuition" (FWJS).

Thinking the cube "creates an almost exclusively bodily meaning" (CL) of its geometry. Form that melts into being. To be the cube one must give up oneself in favor of the cube. I have become more cube than myself. My being exists the cube.

A four-cornered thought, inhuman. A flat thought, horizontal and vertical, banging its neatness on the four madly equal squares, too perfect, too parallel. The immurement of thinking. A thought creeping inside its receding corners, all at once. Thought-claustrophobia. Reasoning decays into the acuteness of the equidistant four points of the cube. Thinking trapped in its corners: pointilist singularity multiplied by four. Four corners become one, the cube collapses, the thought has vanished.

A thought vanished inside the voidal prison of a cube, into a nothingness perfectly caged. Cubic cataclysm.

Understanding fears imagination, imagination fears perception. Syntheses-horror.

The cube is one of the available shapes of thought which through obsession-compulsion and fixation can produce catastrophe. But since geo-metry is the measure of earth, what new plasticity must thinking acquire in a time when the planet itself is retreating from its protective function as home? How are human thinking and affect being molded by the global scale extinction? How does human thinking take the shape of its own inexistence? How is intuition active in a shapeless shape that is its own negation? If nature recapitulates thinking and thinking recapitulates nature, what kind of nature does a dead thought produce, what is the nature secreted backwards by extinction?

Thinking extinction requires a disengaged engagement

in a “discipline of horror”(EMC), letting thought think itself by risking being and existence. Approaching a perverted and dissipated shape of thought that inhabits an “ambiguous space” where inside and outside have melted together into a horror of viewpoint, into a perpetual cognitive hollowness. A vague space where “the mind has lost its geometrical homeland and space is drifting”(GB).

I want to feel thought thinking only what I cannot experience. “The personal is the geological”(CC). The logic of the earth is alien. The personal is ‘it’. The only possible thought-movement towards the impossible is spiraled, madly encircling the nameless and unknowable.

A thought that climbs on the spiral of its own ashes: a roundabout movement, a glitch-circle around its inexistence.

It is not only that thinking require a plasticity of imagination that through its inevitable catastrophes acts directly upon the environment, upon the relation of existence with its limits. The environment itself feeds back into the operations of reason. “Our thoughts are like the world because we are of the world. Thought (of any kind) is a highly convoluted habit that has emerged out of, and is continuous with, the tendency in the world toward habit taking”(EK/CSP). I do not transform the environment into abstract operations, I am the resultant force, the momentary metastability of the environment thinking me, I am letting myself prey to its semiotics. My point of view, the dynamic concreteness of my position is “a bundle of affects”(EVC), a relational node which survives only through a temporary patience of the whole. The Anthropocene is another name for the becoming-impatient of the environment of humans, for the fickle node into which we are constituted. If thinking follows the logic of the climate, then climate catastrophe acts first and foremost upon thinking as appetition in the form of its (non) productive loss of appetite. “Gloom is more climatological than psychological, the stuff of dim, hazy, overcast skies, of ruins and overgrown tombs, of a misty, lethargic fog that moves with the same languorousness as our own crouched and sullen listening to a disinterested world”(ET).

Thought-plague, hyperesthesia dead thought, night-thought, hazy thinking, blob-thought, mold-cognition, intelligent ooze, autopoietic debris, smart nothingness, junk-appetition, void that thinks, shadow-thought, self-actualizing ghost-thinking.

To think thinking-without-thought requires that geometry lose the earth, that one take the perspective of no perspective, the perspective of the redundancy of any perspective. A perspective that does not equate a point of view in the sense of sight, but a dynamic resultant of the semiotics of an environment that has always been indifferent—and now appears hostile only because we attached to it as to a home. A perspective requires localization, auto-detection, a pointing towards, its self-naming. Geometry is impossible even on earth. It is used as mere perpetuation of the absolute fog of metrics, measurement and precision. Geometry is born out of its lack of earth. “Geometry without earth corresponds to a measure of reality as infinitely attributed, as exceeding all possible sets of names”(NM).

Geometry is an echo of no-metry. A perspective is the temporary individuation of an echo. Its coming to being reflects its stubbornness. Its possibility emerges against the ground of its impossibility. A perspective is a sound mirrored back by its environment, an echo abducted, abducting. It resembles the reverberation of a polyphony collapsed into a single thought-note, strange-to-itself. The echo-thought: noise-sound unintelligibly cognized. Roaring lullaby.

Extinction is a supersonic thoughtboom. At the moment of collapse, it will be right within my earshot, as it always was. Everything will crumble, yet everything will be the same. Hear! Silence as usual.

## V: The Negative Sublime of Extinction

*However solid objects seem.*

*they yet are formed of matter mixed with void.*

Lucretius

*Extinction: plunge into your navel with full force until your mouth becomes your hol(e)y sphincter which starts excreting time again.*

L'aura di Cristallo

Anthropocenic thinking requires a mode of thought inseparable from the death of thought. Thinking extinction intensely to such extent that thought itself is being dragged by its own coffin—the inverted movement of Django through the dusty landscape of the ‘wild west’. I am being dragged into life by my own inhumanity. “Life is a kind of madness that death makes. Long live the dead because we live in them”(CL). I have become indifferent to myself, indifferent to my own impenetrable obscurity. “The darkness in its unknowing is not outside us—the Outside...is coextensive with the human at its absolute limit”(ET).

In thinking thinking-without-thought there is a violence, a self-referential trauma of thought feeling more than it can think: “In the sublime thinking does a violence to itself. It feels more than it can think”(SZ via IK). Sublime is the catastrophe of thought hitting the event of extinction as that of its never-having-been. What are the feedback and feedforward loops between reality and extinction, between thought and its inexistence? If imagining extinction triggers an experience of the sublime, how does this feed back on our sensorium?

Affect is the measure of a world held together by the gravity of extinction. We are just following the affective cues of a world approaching its doom. Thinking the Anthropocene already happens, imperceptibly. “Before thinking, then, I’ve already thought”(CL). The negative sublime of extinction is the interrupted thought, the blank, the delay “between the organism as a sensory-motor apparatus and the world that is (at least intellectually) mapped according to its own measure”(CC). The abstract force of affect tweaks the gravity of thinking into a thought of life that takes the measure of death, into a thought of human scaled by its inhumanity, into a ‘will to power’ of inexistence itself as the only impetus for all existence.

"Signs don't come from the mind. Rather, it is the other way around. What we call mind, or self, is a product of semiosis"(EK/CSP). The inhumanity of thought is apparent in thinking thought as climatological semiosis. Thinking thought as noosphere rather than as a product of any form of individuality implies a feedback and forward loop between cognition and practice, between thinking and moving, navigating the environment. Any alteration of the climate impinges upon thought. The more the environment becomes unruly, the more the rule of thought reforms itself. The more we approach extinction, the more the time of thinking collapses and intensifies. If "the sublime is a cybernetic diagram that can be instantiated in multiple ways"(SZ), thinking extinction is a mysticism of the 'incomputable'(LP via GC), an ever interrupted affective calculus, an infinite recursion of what cannot be thought at the core of cognition. A superdeathspeed that silently mutilates the sensorial medium of our thinking. The event of extinction places itself on a diagram outside temporal causality. Extinction is the event with which one connects atemporally, mindlessly.

Thinking climactically climatological thinking both as extinction and as ecology can produce nervous breakdowns, inferential collapse, a dense fog of reason out of which strange contingencies emerge. Points of cognitive catastrophe, thought-discontinuities, are retroactively produced by the end of human climate. The 'tychean'(CSP) aspect of thinking becomes more and more apparent in this anthropocenic atmosphere. 'Blows of chance'(L) hit a thinking that risks throwing itself outside of itself, an outside from the inside. We are trapped into the retro-action of the event of extinction creating the mental and affective possibilities that have lead to it.

Backwards Anthropocene: extinction produces 'us'.

In human eyes the dust of extinction is presently glaring. Thinking as the reflection of your look in the eyebeam of impossibility, in the intelligent stim of the dark pupil of extinction.

The thought-image of extinction is sublime and we

are inhabiting its cosmic halo. We delve in a shadow-world glowing at the edges of extinction, of its never-having-been. “One can think of the halo (...) as a zone in which possibility and reality, potentiality and actuality, become indistinguishable”(GA). I am breathing the halo of my own inexistence. “The halo is the it”(CL).

Air is more thing than myself. I fall apart into infinite faint replicas of me. I dissipate, weaker than ether, drifting away, as nonexistent as this “derelict world of dust”(JGB).

If affect is the perception of self-perception, the felt rhythm of a cascade of multiple-nothingness, then that perception gains more roundness, attains its fullness in a climate suffused by extinction. The more alive life is, the closer to its extinction. The completeness of life grows in equality with its becoming-extinct to the point that birth is equivalent with extinction. The absolute thought comprehends its own inexistence, its existence outside of itself. There is a gravity of extinction that changes the gravity of thought. “Love of life equals the love of extinction”(FF).

“(N)othing we know can ground or determine our decisions”(CC). Only nothingness becomes a decisional ground—of a decision that decides itself. The thought of the worst is a thought aiming for its own exuberance, its roundness is only achieved through its space of inexistence. The pessimal is the maximized joy of thought, thinking as fulfilled appetition. Realism becomes a cartography of a dislocated reality, of an in-itself always outside of itself, completed only by the inclusion of its destruction. Photographing the ‘deep field’ of the cosmos, Hubble has come so near to a representation of the history of the universe—“at a stone’s throw”(IHG). Nevertheless, “to have an accurate image of the origin of the world, Hubble must recover the inexistence of the world...If we manufacture a cosmos it must include its own inexistence.”(IHG). Galactic bliss: “ultimate black photograph”(NM).

Thinking climato-logically requires the entanglement of climate and thinking. Climate change is an altering and alteration of a more comprehensive climate—politi-

cal, affective, cognitive, meteorological. Thinking extinction is trapped in a double bind: extinction of the thought of climate and thinking as climatic logic of extinction. Extinction is a possessive force. Thinking becomes the pace of swooning into the nothingness of oneself, into the 0-climate of individuation. We are doomed and our (in)human thinking burrows its way blindly and indifferently towards its own non-being to leave a thinking more round and complete follow its inhuman path. Ah, but even doom is intelligent, hence doom is itself doomed!

The paradoxical nature of anthropocenic thinking restores what was all the time there: an ontological negativity and a universal noncoincidence of matter with itself. Even "God is not fully himself...there is something in God that isn't God"(SZ/FWJS). Nothingness is intelligence in its recursive renunciation of its will to be nothing. The void relinquishes itself. It is being more than itself through volitional fade. Its auto-superposition opens up the wound of thinking that vomits on all the superlative brilliance of nothing. Nothing-intelligence is discharged from the suppurating impossibility of void's coincidence with itself. Paradoxically, the clinamenial potential awakes in the more-than-empty sphere of renunciation. A more-than-silent intelligence has whispered this through me. The Lucretian clinamen, the unpredictable slight deviation of atoms falling through the void is a double thought-as-appetition: loss of appetite of the void that is gently, slightly devoured by the minimal gluttony of the falling atom, through its soft swerve. Thought is a self-actualizing deviation from itself. Thought: a double never-having-been. Thought has never—more or less—gone astray from nothing.

Thinking thinks through me and in spite of me. I became a dark climatology of a beyond nearer than nearness itself. "We shall be inhuman—as humankind's greatest conquest. To be is to be beyond the human"(CL). I feel a propensity to leap and yet to remain in place for I am not. Extinction is nested at the infra-level and my thinking is hopelessly pitted with its inexistence. I am more ()hole than whole.

In writing I am quoting you, I am quoting nothing. I am just weaving quotation marks around the nothingness of words.

## Epilogue: The Night—A Swarm of Points

*Thought does not illuminate the Real, but projects its own real shadow upon what it cannot see.*

Nicola Masciandaro

*...points of nocturnal space do not refer to each other as illuminated space; there is no perspective, they are not situated.*

Emmanuel Levinas

In a cosmical staring at the world-without-us the iconic black square seems to have enveiled the whole universe. The eternal night of a cosmos that excreted an accidental human world looms over the banal and familiar, even while basking in the sun. A void gapped into geometry (the measure of the geo, the earth). Every irreducible dot is the bearer of an infinite hole. In-finite is the body of the finite as black is the body of light.

The impersonal form of 'it' lurks upon any comforting sensation. "The mind does not find itself faced with an apprehended exterior. The exterior remains uncorrelated with an interior. It is no longer given. It is no longer a world. What we call the I is itself submerged by the night, invaded, depersonalized, stifled by it"(EL).

Gazing into the night, I try to amplify its indistinctness until something is distinguished. In darkness something is never somewhere, it is everywhere. The more I strain my retinal muscles, the more I am driven mad by the ceaseless swarming of minuscule points. I am pointless, bathing in the waver of the night till annihilation. Nothing is something and I am fading away in the sea of dotted infinity. The night is a swarm of points that cripples my sight and swirls my anonymous thoughts. "I am from the never"(CL).

I cannot wipe away my night-thoughts, expectorate my

existence, disarticulate the continuum between the whiteness of persistent bones and the bland error of my soft life. I carry darkness inside a body that is not even mine. This body—sac of darkness, fluid entrapment of anonymity, blind to itself, blind to its thoughts.

The matter of darkness is boiling in silent night-bubbles. Pitch-lava erupting from the nano-volcanoes of my pupil—a pupil no longer mine but of night itself. In darkness I see my sight, I feel my eyes seeing, touching on nothingness. Culmination of sight: by the enormous dilatation of the pupil I become black itself. I am pure infra-noir.

Introspection is a dark speleology of the vague being that is you. The cavernous inside is blob of cosmic darkness. You and I—freak accidents of death. Our lethargy: melting the day into night each night, melting the day into night each day. Light is a wound of the night and we are the dark wounds of light.

The night is a swarm of points creeping off the exterior to melt with what we are most sure that is us. We inhale the night and exhale spores of darkness, we feed on the fear ingrained in the matter of our very (in)existence. We are sweating waves of night while wiping the sudor of fear. Life is in us to germinate death.

The body, unfolded, holds on to a less and less cosy bottom of terra firma. The only reference left by a night that “strips consciousness of its very subjectivity” is the pulling force of the Earth. Submerged in the sweeping anonymous night I am one step away from the fall. A fall like a smooth and instant drill through the soil or a fall upwards—hor-rific jerk of the earth hurling me off it. Engulfed by the earth like the Conqueror Worm or falling through it. Through the ()hole that is my own (in)existence. Trapped in life, on the surface, inside the lures of an overwhelming futility. An unbearable blackness absorbs my crooked humanness and thrusts in me the seed of unknown. Submerged in the sweeping anonymous night the earth too forgets its solidity. “Black universe is the dark body of the Real. Stop looking. Stand in black universe, and see. ‘Nigra sum, sed formosa’

(Song of Songs 1:4) [I am black, but beautiful]"(NM).

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# Dead Thinking: Part 2

Florin Flueras

*Man needs to give himself a perspective on nonknowledge in the form of death.*

Bataille

*To 'realize' the concept of nothingness is not to see nothingness but to die.*

Levinas

## Alive Thinking

There is an absolutely obvious, normal step, almost a command, a silent requirement to do what we should do in order to secure and improve our life. We want to succeed, to achieve something in this world. Our thinking, perceiving, behaving are shaped by a belief in (the improvement of our) life which guides us in our daily activities, in our moral and political attitudes. An alive thinking is consolidated on and on and this alive, healthy thinking constantly forms us as healthy, functional humans. And as humans we want that a healthy, alive world takes shape around our healthy habits.

William James witnessed how healthy thinking became a new religion or at least a new background for old religions in the middle of the 19th century when the advance of liberalism brought about "a victory of healthy-mindedness" over the morbidity of the old 'hell-fire theology'. Healthy-mindedness believes in universal evolution, 'general meliorism', progress, and appreciates "the conquering efficacy of courage, hope, trust". Healthy-mindedness fosters an optimistic "muscular attitude", similar to the one implicit in the 'Don't Worry Movement,' which has a motto that one is encouraged to repeat to oneself often: 'youth, health, vigor!'. But healthy-mindedness brings also

contempt: for doubt, fear, worry, and “all nervously precautionary states of mind”. For a healthy mind “the attitude of unhappiness is not only painful, it is mean and ugly”. It is impossible to maintain this healthy-mindedness without “zealously emphasizing the brighter and minimizing the darker aspects of the objective sphere of things at the same time ... we divert our attention from disease and death as much as we can; and the slaughter-houses and indecencies without end on which our life is founded are huddled out of sight and never mentioned.”<sup>26</sup>

Healthy thinking avoids morbidity and tries to be optimistic but this doesn’t matter too much, the morbidity is in the world itself—we may abandon morbidity but morbidity is not abandoning us. We believe in life and we are attached to the features of this world but this world is doomed, we are doomed. As we all know, death is much more powerful than life, at least we feel it if we don’t think it. But death is not just a personal problem anymore, we are in an era of death, in a dying world. Now we know that we are in the middle of the extinction—we are in the quickest species extinction period, faster than when dinosaurs were extinct, facing climate change, imminent resource depletion, catastrophic economic disorder, etc. This planetary decline affects our modes of perceiving, thinking and feeling, we somehow register these changes and we are affected even (or especially) if we are not aware. But if we are not aware maybe there is a reason for that, apart from the tendency of healthy thinking to protect itself from disturbing thoughts.

Whitehead associates the concept of ‘life’ with the concept of individuality and with “a complex process of appropriating into a unity of existence the many data presented as relevant by the physical processes of nature.”<sup>27</sup> This could be seen as one of the first steps towards an alive healthy thinking, together with what we can call the acquiring of a life perspective as the perspective of a proto-self that starts to narrow experience according to its interests. Or, in the

26 William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experiences*

27 Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*

words of Claire Colebrook: “the very desire for completeness that drives the organism to couple with its world will also preclude it from seeing the world in any terms other than its own.”<sup>28</sup> The premises of the current politics were born along with life and are naturally part of life. We can sense in this ‘life’ the seeds of a thinking which is instrumental, use-oriented, self maintaining, managerial. A life is growing and an identity is constituted, an alive thinking is slowly installing itself exactly through this attack upon the environment. A thinking which produces and is produced by a ‘malevolent life’ because of which “the earth will continue to be sacrificed to the blindness of an organic thinking that can only insist upon its own self-evident value.”<sup>29</sup> Our healthy love of life equals the extinction of life.

We realize that our ways of seeing, feeling, thinking and behaving are equivalent with the extinction of life and we are scared but like in a stampede, or like in any other moment when there is too much or too little information, imitation takes over. We just reinforce and accelerate what the others are doing and what we know, our petit alive, healthy thinking. A naturalized panic maintains the parameters of thinking unchanged. A similar blockage is also the desire to imitate the past. The air is filled with nostalgia: maybe we can go back to a time before the world was disenchanted, before we lost contact with ourselves and nature, before life became violent and instrumental. Maybe we can have again the magical thinking from before the witches were burned to create space and momentum for the acceleration of our malevolent thinking. Maybe we can have again a more complete and meaningful relation with the environment. Maybe we can reduce the distance from nature and be nature again. Maybe something can be done for the human to be re-animated, sensible, empathic and to feel again—and perhaps this life enhancement will bring back the hope and the future will exist again...

28 Alfred North Whitehead, *Modes of Thought*

29 Claire Colebrook, *The Death of the PostHuman: Essays on Extinction*

If the present panicked healthy thinking is not an option and the nostalgic turning back seems impossible and uninteresting, what about accelerating towards the future? Maybe the way out of the optimistic and destructive enlightenment is to accelerate it—"the only way out is all the way through". Via Bataille, Deleuze, Nick Land, one of the moves of the recent years is to accelerate reason: epistemic accelerationism. Negarestani considers that to the 'old rationality' an attitude of avoidance and suppression of the unknown was and is specific. Classical rationalism verifies what it already knows, it cannot mobilize itself to confront the obscure, the unknown. That's why it appears as rigidity, dogmatism and it has the burning of the witches as its emblem. Negarestani is arguing for a new elan of rationality—a new rationality that is no more afraid of the irrational and the unknown. The new rationality is akin to the cowboys of the wild west, it is "the frontier man of reason"—it carries the violence of reason. New rationality "deploys the whole armamentarium at the limits of the irrational". Instead of dismissing the irrational it confronts it frontally. It confronts the irrational not to verify it but to imagine new methodologies of reason.<sup>30</sup>

This new rationalist approach starts with a necessity to minimize the assumptions. After you have eliminated almost everything, including gods, beliefs and mysticism, reality is a minimal desert upon which we can start to construct rules and practices to manipulate ourselves and nature, to know ourselves by constructing ourselves. A world grows around the reason that amplifies itself. A world in which we begin to approach truth and goodness through 'a game of navigation'.<sup>31</sup> It seems that the way to confront the unknown is to start from scratch and to build a fully bright world, a world without darkness, without unknown. But what if after we have truly minimized the assumptions we end up not with a bright fully-navigable desert but rather with something closer to nothingness, to the void, to an impenetrable darkness?

Then the new rationalist project seems to share the

30 Reza Negarestani lecture at PAF, 2013

31 Reza Negarestani lecture at PAF, 2014

destiny of old rationalism. Stengers outlined this destiny by describing Descartes as a tiny figure surrounded by darkness, holding a lamp that radiates a hopeless circle of light. Descartes, she continued, turns in circles repeating: “I think therefore I am, I think therefore I am, I think therefore I am...”<sup>32</sup> If we continue this analogy it seems like the circles of the new rationalists are getting bigger and the light stronger. Or if we continue the remark of Jünger about the philosophers of the unconscious who were exploring darkness with the flashlight, we can say that the new rationalists are studying darkness with the most powerful projectors ever. This image—the assault upon the unknown with huge projectors in a sea of darkness—is not only hilarious but also hopelessly heroic somehow. It is a strange super-healthy thinking, and if we think along the “night is also a sun” of Nietzsche, maybe we can say that after a point too much light is darkness too.

Either way, darkness seems unavoidable. What can we do after we have understood that we are facing a non-navigable darkness that cannot be illuminated and approached by reason? We cannot stay where we are because the enlightened world is collapsing, neither do we possess the necessary abilities to approach darkness. This is the place where Dead Thinking could appear, in the twilight of reason, where the hopes end, and the remaining options are rather dark, negative and dead. Instead of accelerating a new rationalism maybe we should prepare a new mysticism for the non-navigable darkness that is here. Dead Thinking starts as an acceleration in the wrong direction, an approach to darkness with darkness. And as an accelerated correlationism, with a twist—everything is you but you are nowhere to be found.

### **Thinking with Death**

Light for Levinas is the condition for meaning, for thinking but also the condition for property, which “constitutes the world”: “through the light the world is given and apprehended...The miracle of light is the essence of thought: due

to the light an object, while coming from without, is already ours in the horizon which precedes it.”<sup>33</sup> Light is about registering information, about the known and knowable, it is the foundation of healthy and alive thinking. But something unsettling is camouflaged in light itself. A strange night can sometimes be felt in the most ordinary moments of plain healthy thinking, “different forms of night” can occur right in the daytime. “Illuminated objects can appear to us as if in twilight shapes. Like the unreal, inverted city we find after an exhausting trip, things and beings strike us as though they no longer are composing a world, and were swimming in the chaos of their existence.”<sup>34</sup> Not only is light always encompassed by darkness but darkness lingers there, even in the most beautiful moments, in the most delightful sunny landscapes. We all know it and maybe feel it sometimes when we are ‘weak’: “something dark, something abysmal always finds its way into the bland beauty of such pictures, something that usually holds itself in abeyance, some entwining presence that we always know is there.”<sup>35</sup>

If nothing else, time will dismantle our defenses and we will become weak and permeable to this darkness that is not just a rare and special ingredient of daylight but is the reality behind the superficial spectacle of light. Not only does night come again and again but it is there all the time. Or in Cioran’s words: “At first, we think we advance toward the light; then, wearied by an aimless march, we lose our way: the earth, less and less secure, no longer supports us; it opens under our feet. Vainly we should try to follow a path toward a sunlit goal; the shadows mount within and below us.” In this context the source of “all of life’s evils” is our “will to exist at once imperceptible and shameless”—a too optimistic conception of life which doesn’t account for the fact that “life is what decomposes at every moment; it is a monotonous loss of light, an insipid dissolution in the dark-

33        Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*

34        Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*

35        Thomas Ligotti, *The Shadow at the Bottom of the World*

ness, without scepters, without halos.”<sup>36</sup> Or as Nick Land later put it: this “feverish obscenity we call ‘life’...appears as a pause on the energy path; as a precarious stabilization and complication of solar decay.”<sup>37</sup>

A minimum optimism can be maintained for a while, with great costs of energy, but slowly the effort needed to maintain the hope of life cannot be sustained anymore. The obsession with life is just a cramp, a short-time stiffness in front of the unknown, an insignificant small blockage on the path to annihilation. Whatever we are doing, death is inside every action, it is the reality and the final aim of everything. Everything is dead or on the path to death. From this point of view the obsession with life looks like a strange disease. We have to do amazing cognitive acrobatics to be able to maintain for a while our normal ‘irreality’, our petit healthy thinking. It is a great effort to keep holding it in this way, why not just let go? It seems that we are in a good time for a release, for a departure from the bright perspective of life. The protective skin of life is very thin nowadays. Because of the three main aspects of contemporary thinking—materialism, scientific rationalism, and the idea of progress—“there is a sense of the meaninglessness of a purely materialistic and mechanistic world and an accompanying awareness of the nihilism that lies concealed just beneath the surface of the world.”<sup>38</sup>

But the decisive factor that disturbs our healthy thinking is the event of extinction. Extinction functions as a new gravitational force which affects everything and bends thought differently. Everything that was normal and ordinary now becomes totally ridiculous. A lot of what was pathological becomes the new reasonable. In the movie Melancholia, Justine is the sister who allowed for the coming extinction to do its work on her thinking and feelings. From the perspective of healthy thinking she behaved madly, whilst she was the only one attuned to the reality of extinction. Shaviro (via

36       Emil Cioran, *A Short History of Decay*

37       Nick Land, *The Thirst for Annihilation*

38       Keiji Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*

Dominic Fox) calls this pathological move “militant dysphoria”, which is a “state of being that no longer sees the world as its own, or itself as part of the world. As Fox puts it, “the distinction between living and dead matter collapses. The world is dead, and life appears within it as an irrational persistence, an insupportable excrescence.”<sup>39</sup>

If the shadows of Melancholia grow too big, a time comes when the optimistic alive thinking cannot hide anymore the fact that existence is sorrow, that “life is evil”. What in the eyes of a healthy thinking seems madness and depression is in fact just a dissipation of the veil of healthy thinking. There is a sorrow which is not related to particular aspects of “my life” but a sorrow of existence itself, a sorrow that is constitutive of the workings and matter of the Universe. A sorrow that is the ground of being.<sup>40</sup> “Everyone has something to sorrow over, but none more than he who knows and feels that he is. All other sorrow in comparison with this is a travesty of the real thing. For he experiences true sorrow, who knows and feels not only what he is, but that he is.”<sup>41</sup>

In a paradoxical ouroboros type of move the extinction approaches and affects (eats) the ‘I’, the cause of extinction. Maybe under the shadow of Melancholia we should embrace this extinction of the ‘I’, to voluntarily take the perspective of death and admit that “from the very outset life is at one with death. This means that all living things, just as they are, can be seen under the Form of death.”<sup>42</sup> If you think from the future you cannot have other perspective than one infested with death. And this perspective comes with a new horror—the horror of living. The horror of living and the horror of death are mirroring each other like in the Etruscan torture in which a living body is coupled face to face, as close as possible, to a corpse till they rot together. According to Negarestani, the true and often neglected horror in this case is the horror of life seen through the eyes of the dead. “It is indeed

39 Steven Shaviro, *Melancholia or, The Romantic Anti-Sublime*

40 Nicola Masciandaro, *A Matter of Sorrow*

41 The Cloud of Unknowing

42 Keiji Nishitani, *Religion and Nothingness*

ghastly for the living to see itself as dead; but it is true horror for the dead to be forced to look at the supposedly living, and to see itself as the living dead, the dead animated by the spurious living" it is a molestation "of the dead with the animism of the living."<sup>43</sup>

The perspective of death or of the dead can be too much, and for the same reasons too little—it could be too detached from our actual behaviors and for this reason it is difficult for it to enter in relation with our life activities and really affect us. The fact that death is the ultimate unknown can be so removed and distant a truth that it becomes inoperative. Paradoxically, the perspective of death could be as stable and solidly grounded in death as the perspective of the living is grounded in life. It can easily remain just a weird form of healthy thinking, a game of morbid imagination, too spectacular and exaggerated to really menace us. But a zone between death and life, or a zone of death-life, in which a minimal perspective of the living is preserved, enough for a fear of death and a thinking with death to be effective, seems much more corrosive for a healthy thinking.

In different mystical traditions the constant presence of death in proximity of every doing gives a real perspective on things, about what really matters. Similarly, the subtle and constant presence of the fear of extinction can give a sense about what is important at a bigger scale. Thinking and acting have to take this immense force into account. There is a big problem with most political thought that still functions in a paradigm of progress and improvement, totally inadequate with the time of accelerated contraction and descent in which we find ourselves. The world is crumbling and any politics, any thinking about the present, has to take this into consideration. Then the question is: how to insert death and fear in what we are actually doing, not just in what we imagine? What else is to be found in death and darkness other than (indeed very interesting) thinking-games, limits of thinking or aesthetic experiences of the negative sublime?

## Dead Thinking

Light is a deception, what appears is always below potential, below expectations. If you enter a dark place and turn the lights on, there is a moment, usually imperceptible, of deception (and relief): everything is so much less than what it could be. The promise of darkness is always betrayed when light invades. But darkness is usually a deception as well. For Cioran darkness can be "quite as mediocre as the light". Probably because "night itself is never dark enough to keep us from being reflected in it."<sup>44</sup> Usually we implicitly add imaginary light and sight to every darkness, constantly forcing a light-continuity into it, automatically filling darkness with what we know, projecting our world into it. For Bataille the world of objects persists in 'simple night' because of an attention that functions by 'way of words'. But there is a darkness that is not the absence of light but 'absorption into the outside' by way of a heart that has dilated and is no longer an organ but an 'entire sensibility'.<sup>45</sup>

This sensibility is exactly what is usually avoided in order to maintain a certain sanity. The potential, the fear, the unknown are automatically evacuated from every night. Instinctively and naturally 'pathological' sensibility is being avoided in all societies. It is preferable to not have a soul than to have one that is a source of fear because of its instability and contact with the unknown. In the Wari tribe from Amazonia, the soul gives the body not feelings, thoughts or consciousness but it gives it instability. The Wari hold that "healthy and active people do not have a soul (jam-)." <sup>46</sup> A soul that gives instability is unhealthy and not desirable. The healthy approach is to prefer a safe and knowable territory, a space that can be constantly fortified with alive habits and healthy thinking. A space that stays forever lightened—even after you turned off all the lights.

44       Emil Cioran, *A Short History of Decay*

45       Georges Bataille, *Inner Experience*

46       Aparecida Vilaça, *Chronically Unstable Bodies: Reflections on Amazonian Corporalities*

But what if, following a pathological drive, you want to escape the lively and luminous prison, so sharply described by Clarice Lispector: “I can understand only what happens to me, but only what I understand happens?”<sup>47</sup> A possible answer comes from John of the Cross: “to come to be what you are not you must go by a way in which you are not.”<sup>48</sup> The problem is that the only way in which you know how to go is the way in which you are. All what you are capable of comes from what you know. And the way in which you are is the result of going on known ways. Practically, this is a prison that you cannot leave and for which there is no knowledge about how to escape it because you and all the knowledge that you (can) have are the prison. You are always on known roads to known lands, there is no outside, no darkness—everywhere and everything is too much you.

It is no wonder that in the majority of mystical and shamanic approaches this is the point where a self-annihilation, crucifixion, disintegration or dismembering is advised. For our times this seems a bit exaggerated and out of place because there are no social and cultural environments, active rituals and beliefs that can facilitate such mystical operations in this world. There are no grounds and possible beliefs that could pull us in a spectacular move into the outside of the prison. If we cannot go for a big, mystical and dramatic move of self-annihilation, an option left is to start from zero, from small moves of self-alteration at the level of micro-behaviors, micro-perceptions, weak affects—to develop a sort of a low mysticism that operates at the atomic level of the everyday behaviors—darkness, outside, unknown, and maybe even death to be constructed.

The black box of the theater is a possible environment for low mysticism—it facilitates a focus on the details of life, a detachment of actions, thoughts and affects from the everyday reality, people, objects, and even a work with abstract behaviors and states of mind. The blackness of the walls helps to concentrate the attention on any object,

47 Clarice Lispector, *The Passion According to G.H.*

48 John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul*

person, movement, thought that is introduced in the box, and the walls are also a constant subliminal reminder of the darkness of the outside. The fourth wall, where the audience (real or imaginary) is, functions as a strange impersonal eye that forces an outside perspective on the person in the box—a visual but mostly affective perspective that can be interiorized and always there, after a certain point. An apparently neutral space seems to be ready, inviting to construct, amplify and manipulate realities.

Just that this black box is not empty or neutral at all, at least as long as you or another 'I' is in it. The prison that Lispector speaks of becomes apparent, our healthy thinking shines in its plenitude in a black box. All the habits of perception, thinking, movement are amplified. We appear there as old knowledge sedimented automata programmed and animated by the past, without presence. And forced to become partially self-aware by the black box frame, the bodies usually become stressed, anxious, tense, rigid—ridiculous puppets that spoil the darkness of the box with their embodied petit healthy thinking. Humans feel exposed there—living deceptions for this outside eye of which they are part as well, the eye of the fourth wall. For amplifying and exposing all this the black box is magical indeed. And because of that, usually this magical side is quickly drowned in decors, representations, characters, stories—a whole spectacle is enforced to cover up this unpleasant capacity of the black box to reveal our petit healthy thinking. An obsessive avoidance of the magic of the black box is a sane decision for an artist if she doesn't want to end up in too a revelatory Teatro Grottesco that can have only one consequence: "the end of that artist's work."<sup>49</sup>

A performer who enters the black box without any constraints, free to do whatever she wants, with the intention to go beyond what she knows and find the 'new', will almost invariably fill the stage with automatisms and clichés and, as any performer already knows, everything will end up in a grotesque 'bad improvisation'. It is not enough to

'abandon' the known and expect the unknown to appear. For Bataille quite the opposite is the case, one should go till the end of the possibilities of knowing before arriving to unknowing.<sup>50</sup> Rather than pretending to renounce knowledge one should, on the contrary, push it to the limits, know everything that one can about the situation in which one enters and at the same time abandon it by choosing to not act according to it but leave it in the background, where it is totally needed, in the hope of making a leap beyond. This accentuation of knowledge, along with the renunciation of it, is a paradoxical and very difficult move because, if one actualizes all the information about a certain issue, one is automatically inclined to use it.

As Nick Land via Bataille observed: "no organism is adapted to arrive at the unknown."<sup>22</sup> The default procedure is that we function based on what we know by implicitly following the available package of knowledge and expectations that are embedded in every situation. Through a strike of the 'I', combined with a suspicion about 'I know', the impression that something comes from outside, from beyond, or despite ourselves, can be created. New habits based on this 'impression' are ready to appear and an investment in the unknown—a belief in the beyond-us is activated. We can even start to name that beyond: affect, intuition, unconscious, unknown, darkness, outside, after life, death, divinity, nature, etc. A faith in the unknown seems to be the condition for a leap beyond the known, for the unknown to exist—even if this beyond or outside doesn't exist, by starting to behave as it does, it will start to coagulate itself, to exist. For practical reasons, it doesn't really matter if we discover an outside or if we create it, if there really is something alien that comes in when we retreat, or if this exterior agency is constructed and is 'just an illusion', both situations have the same effects and further than that it doesn't really matter.

The desire for 'global nonknowledge' is for Bataille the stranger question of philosophy. And as a philosopher you are in trouble when this desire is awake because you have

to function in the area of a difficult paradox: in order to get close to this nonknowledge you have to annihilate the will to knowledge—"each time we relinquish the will to knowledge...possibilities are, in effect, more open" and we have "a far more intense contact with the world...From the death of thought, from nonknowledge a new knowledge is possible." And if the philosopher is pushed to the extreme by her desire, the paradox gets worse: "man needs to give himself a perspective on nonknowledge in the form of death."<sup>51</sup> At a level of a low scale mysticism this desire for nonknowledge can be translated into a slow disappearance of ourselves as constituted by past actions and decisions through an insertion of 'I don't know' in each atom of behavior.

A minimal death can be brought by cultivating an autophagic intelligence—an ouroboric reason that is not just an attack on the environment but an attack on itself. To assist the auto-installation of a suicidal habit of the known, a practice could be the constant application of infinite negations like in the 'via negativa' of the dark mysticism: this thing or behavior is not that, and is not that, neither that... For a real or imaginary spectator (an embedded spectator at work even in the person of the performer) it feels like a withdrawal of the image from action itself, the representation is not allowed to stabilize, the recognition is obstructed. This can be felt as if something is playing tricks with your mind. And often the reaction is laughter—for Bataille a standard reaction when the unknown confronts the human. In Romanian there is a saying: "you're laughing, you're laughing but this is not your laughter." It is implied that something else is laughing in you. And for a performer to be able to generate this withdrawal of the image something else has to perform within her as well, she has to be herself taken by surprise. The retrieval of the image is an impossible action that cannot be done voluntarily—you cannot do it, it is done to you.

This "self-negating form of representation" pushed to the limit can induce "a retinal pessimism: there is nothing to see (and you're seeing it)", and points towards a "nothing-

ness prior to all existence, an un-creation prior to all creation", towards blackness.<sup>52</sup> Blackness is a limit of perception and thinking, and it contains in itself the potential to exit the terrain of the known, to exit the healthy visuality—the utilitarian gaze always in search of objects to exploit or to feed on. A night which we do not grasp through thought can bring a "cessation of thought" in which the 'I', if it is still there, is "the object rather than the subject of an anonymous thought."<sup>53</sup> This gloomier night "more terrible than any night" is issued from a "wound of thought which had ceased to think, of thought taken ironically as object by something other than thought", by the night itself.<sup>54</sup> This dark night "which enters the soul" has a divine intelligence that should be trusted and followed, even if it is silencing human faculties, paralyzing the human part of the host: "it is God who is now working in the soul; He binds its interior faculties, and allows it not to cling to the understanding, nor to have delight in the will, nor to reason with the memory... in darkness the soul not only avoids going astray but advances rapidly."<sup>55</sup>

There is a close relation between darkness, unknown and fear. Not only is darkness one of the main triggers of the unknown but, in a mysterious way, by focusing on darkness through the techniques of unknowing mentioned above, darkness can become more than a visual experience, it can be felt, especially as fear. The fear of darkness is the moment when the senses cannot extract much from the world: what is available to us, what we know, is not enough in order to be in control and maintain ourselves stable. Then a sensibility for the unknown can appear, first in a form of a cold chill of fear in the body. It is not the usual fear coming from a fantasy about the future but a dark-fear that comes from a feeling of the present. It is a fear of the potential and unknown in the darkness, a fear that directly touches and affects you physically. Fear is the substance of darkness, it is the way in

52 Maurice Blanchot, *Thomas the Obscure*

53 Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*

54 How to Activate a Shadow-Body: <http://t.co/KfH6TiA2gi>

55 John of the Cross, *Dark Night of the Soul*

which darkness communicates—darkness is fear.

In a strange YouTube tutorial a man on an empty beach teaches the viewers how to arrive to a shadow-body showing repeatedly how: “my consciousness tells my mind to tell my body to move his hand, and the hand moves the shadow”. By showing how his shadow follows the body he demonstrates that the shadow obeys his consciousness.<sup>32</sup> Dead Thinking ‘teaches’ us an opposite type of approach: to start from the shadows and let them affect the body, mind, consciousness—instead of increasing control of consciousness over the shadows, allow the shadows to increase their power to affect consciousness; giving more importance to shadows rather than to the illuminated features of things; going beyond the visual—free the eyes, let them be attracted and moved by the shadows, touch and be touched by the darkness—eyes as skin specialized, oversensitive overgrown to meet-touch the light, skin-eye that sees-touches; amplifying the shivering of dark-fear until the feeling of darkness permeates the skin; perceiving shadows, darkness as feelings, as low and smooth fear—as minimal horror hidden in ordinary situations; unblocking the contact with fear—the fear of the shadows that we see when we are alone in a forest during the night and the fear of our own shadow in plain day, both feeding the unknown. Fear as bridge towards the unknown: the only thing Dead Thinking will consolidate.

A healthy, organic thinking corresponds to alchemical procedures that were developed for the extraction/production of the gold out of nigredo (the maximal putrefied blackness), of the real from the unreal, of the rational from irrational. Inversely, dead thinking could be a reversed minimal alchemy, a practice animated by death’s own habits—from gold to a nigredo-feeling—love of gold, light, life are replaced by a smooth fear of darkness, unknown and death. We don’t know where an extended dead thinking could lead. We don’t know what could be a post-political gesture in a time of extinction when politics, in the sense of organizing society and power relations between people, seems more and more a sedative for deadly thoughts. But

we can say together with Masciandaro that “the only politics of black universe is black itself” and “black is the dislocation of the universe.”<sup>56</sup> We don’t know what a Dead Thinking can do, apart from making us available to darkness, and this is already too much, too scary.

William James witnessed how healthy thinking became a new religion or at least a new background for old religions in the middle of the 19th century when the advance of liberalism brought about "a victory of healthy-mindedness" over the morbidity of the old 'hell-fire theology'. Healthy-mindedness believes in universal evolution, 'general meliorism', progress, and appreciates "the conquering efficacy of courage, hope, trust". Healthy-mindedness fosters an optimistic "muscular attitude", similar to the one implicit in the 'Don't Worry Movement,' which has a motto that one is encouraged to repeat to oneself often: 'youth, health, vigor!'. But healthy-mindedness brings also contempt: for doubt, fear, worry, and "all nervously precautionary states of mind". For a healthy mind "the attitude of unhappiness is not only painful, it is mean and ugly". It is impossible to maintain this healthy-mindedness without "zealously emphasizing the brighter and minimizing the darker aspects of the objective sphere of things at the same time . . . we divert our attention from disease and death as much as we can; and the slaughter-houses and indecencies without end on which our life is founded are huddled out of sight and never mentioned."

Healthy thinking avoids morbidity and tries to be optimistic but this doesn't matter too much, the morbidity is in the world itself—we may abandon morbidity but morbidity is not abandoning us.

from "Dead Thinking #2"

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